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THE GOLDEN PIG;

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PART II.

I.

MADAME MONTAURON's champion returned home utterly discouraged and bewildered after the complete failure of his second effort on behalf of the banker's wife. Everything that he had attempted had failed, and it really seemed as if he were destined to achieve exactly the contrary of what he proposed. He had gone out with the intention of recovering the casket and borrowing fifty louis, and he returned, bearing the responsibility of a loan of forty thousand francs, not lent to himself; and besides, not only had he failed to bring the casket with him, but he had so mismanaged matters that its recovery now seemed impossible, for Madame Montauron's husband, put upon his guard by Savinien's awkward attempt, would in future watch with still greater vigilance than before.

Indeed, Savinien despaired of eluding the banker's watchfulness, and wondered when this painful complication of affairs would cease. Happen what might, it was now his duty to inform the unfortunate woman who had placed her trust in his efforts of the exact state of affairs.

Madame Montauron's messenger was due at three o'clock. He sat awaiting her. At three precisely there came a ring at the door in the hall, and he hesitated about opening it, hardly believing that Brigitte would appear on that side. It was she, however. He had never seen her before, but she had so much the appearance of a confidential servant that he did not need to ask her name.

She was a woman of fifty or thereabouts, whom nature had apparently created to be a lady's companion or attendant. Had she been born in Spain, she would, no doubt, have been the housekeeper of some rich priest, or the duenna of some young girl of noble family.

This elderly, discreet attendant was dressed in black from head to foot, and had withal a somewhat refined appearance. Savinien realised that she was a trusty servant, disposed to make any sacrifice for the sake of her mistress, and that he could speak to her with perfect confidence.

He began by telling her of his failure as to the recovery of the casket, omitting nothing and disguising nothing, and when his brief narrative

came to an end he asked her what he could now do, just as he would have asked Madame Montauron the same question.

The time for hesitation had gone by, and Brigitte, besides, must have some good advice to give.

"I foresaw what has happened," said she, without appearing greatly disturbed, "and if Madame Montauron had listened to me, she would not have attempted to recover her casket to-day. I knew that her husband would do as he did."

"You knew it?"

"Yes, for I am well acquainted with him. Since his suspicions have been excited he has not been the same man. It was Monsieur Bouret's giddy talk that did all the harm. Monsieur Bouret told him that you had deposited a casket at the bank, and that was quite enough to excite his mistrust."

"And now, no doubt," rejoined Savinien, "his mistrust has become certainty, for he did not imagine for a moment that I had really forgotten the combination word; he must have seen that I declined to open the compartment because he was there."

"That is very likely."

"I am surprised that he did not fly into a passion, and demand a thorough explanation from me," said the viscount.

"Oh! he won't do that till the very last extremity is reached," replied the old servant, "and he won't make any outbreak even then. He won't turn against his wife openly, or even question her."

"Is he afraid of her?" asked the viscount in surprise.

"No, it isn't that," said Brigitte, "but he loves her, he adores her; his only fear is that he may become too sure of her guilt. He tries to clear up his doubts, but also to deceive himself. Very little would be needed to reassure him, for he is quite wrong as regards the direction which his suspicions take, and he suspects the wrong person. He indeed suspects everything but the truth."

"You mean to say that he busies himself as to what he fancies is Madame Montauron's present conduct, and not as to what she may have done in the past?"

"Yes, and it would be easy to show him that you are not and cannot be the man who has destroyed his happiness. The danger does not lie in your direction."

"But what if Madame Montauron should appear at the reception to-night without her diamonds?"

"She will not appear. This morning I advised her to say that she was ill. I divined that you would not be able to bring the casket away."

"Did she follow your advice, which was very good, I must say?"

"She did not need to pretend to be ill, for she is really unwell. So much excitement has prostrated her entirely. Her physician was sent for, and he has ordered her to remain absolutely undisturbed for several days."

"That is very fortunate. She need not appear at the reception, then, even if Monsieur Montauron receives his guests under these circumstances; still, it is only a respite, and, besides, Monsieur Montauron may wish to see the diamonds."

"He won't venture to ask for them. It would be admitting that he suspects his wife, and as long as he is not quite convinced, he won't expose himself to having to blush for falsely suspecting her."

"At the same time," said Savinien, "it seems to me that he might easily find some excuse for asking to see the casket."

"It was at all times in my charge. So in such a case it is to me that Madame Montauron would refer him. I know what to reply, and I am sure that Monsieur Montauron would not persist in his questions."

"You partly reassure me," said Savinien. "The danger is no longer immediate, but the present situation must come to an end. Some day of other the diamonds will have to be shown again."

"Next Friday, most likely," said Brigitte. "Madame Montauron cannot continue saying that she is ill for more than a week. Besides, there are other reasons for bringing matters to a different position."

"But what can we do? If I return to the Provincial Bank, I shall fare no better. I must have been pointed out to the clerk who let his master know that I was there this morning. No doubt Monsieur Montauron wouldn't again go in person to the vaults to watch me, but a man in his pay might spy upon me, and after I had taken out the casket follow me."

"There is but one way," said the old nurse; "to send some one in your place. I have made inquiries on the subject, and I know that it can be done."

"Yes, I have been told that I can give my admission-ticket to some one else."

"It is only necessary to find some friend who can be trusted."

"That is all, and if Madame Montauron authorises me to do so, I will."

"There is no other way, and you are not obliged to tell your friend the secret."

"I have but one friend whom I have sufficient confidence in to trust with so delicate a mission, and he knows Monsieur Montauron."

"What does that matter if he is a reliable man? He could not betray you in any case, for he wouldn't know anything."

"He knows Monsieur Bouret still better than he knows Monsieur Montauron, and if Monsieur Bouret met him at the Provincial Bank as he met me this morning—when I was not looking for him—he would have great difficulty in escaping from him," resumed Savinien.

Brigitte said nothing. The difficulty appeared a serious one to her also.

"Has your friend any deposit at the Provincial Bank?" she asked, after a moment's silence.

"No, not that I know of."

"But he can make one to-morrow if he chooses?"

"Undoubtedly. The vaults are at the disposal of any one who wishes to subscribe."

"There is nothing, then, to prevent your friend from depositing a box there, even an empty one."

"No. It wouldn't be examined."

"He can take a subscription-ticket, and as soon as he has one he can go and look at his deposit whenever he likes."

"Certainly."

"It will be sufficient, then, for you to indicate the number of the compartment where Madame Montauron's casket is placed and give him the key of it."

"I must, besides, tell him the word to open the lock, but that can be done also; and, as no one is watched, when he is once in the vault——"

"Yes," interrupted Brigitte, "your friend, instead of opening the compartment which he has hired, can open yours, take out the coffer, and

bring it to you. In that way, no one will suspect anything; whereas if he used your card your name would not pass unnoticed."

"Certainly not. The clerk, who has been warned, and who knows my face, would not let him pass, or—which would be still worse—would let him go in and arrange matters so that he would be found searching a compartment that does not belong to him. You are right; the plan you have thought of is the only practicable one."

"Madame Montauron will beg you to resort to it. If you don't lose any time you can have the casket in two or three days."

"To whom shall I give it?"

"To me. I can come here without exciting any surprise on the part of the doorkeeper. My sister, who is infirm, lives in the house, and I come to see her every day. The staircase which leads to her garret-room communicates with the hall there. I shan't be seen coming into your rooms. It will be sufficient for you to tell me at what time I shall find you alone."

"In the morning; ring twice in succession, so that if any one happens to be here, I may take precautions."

"I may tell my mistress, then, that you have not given up trying to help her?"

"Quite so; but I must ask you to tell her the name of the friend to whom I intend to apply. It is Monsieur George Fougerey. You can let me know to-morrow whether she objects to my employing him."

"I will tell you that, sir, and you may perhaps then be able to tell me something about the man whom you promised to question—the man who holds the honour of my dear mistress as well as her life in his hands?"

"The man! What man?" asked Savinien, who began to be confused by all these details.

"The man whom my mistress was going to see when she was obliged to take refuge in your rooms," replied Brigitte.

"You know all about that, then?"

"I know everything, sir. My mistress has no secrets that I am not acquainted with. Why should she have any? I was her foster-mother, and have never left her since she was born. I love her as though she were my own daughter."

"You have never left her, you say? Then you were with her in Italy?"

"Yes, and had she listened to me she would have spared herself bitter suffering. I advised her not to abandon her child. No doubt it would have been necessary to give up France and the circle of society in which she had always moved, to courageously submit to obscurity and poverty, and work to support her daughter. Still, that is what I should have done, for my part, had I fallen."

This was said in such a tone that it affected Savinien deeply. He realised that the woman before him possessed great strength of mind.

"Mademoiselle de Louvigné was not free to do as she wished; she was dependent upon a relative," he muttered.

"A relative whose frivolity and independence were the main cause of her downfall. Madame de Morvieux encouraged the attentions of that objectionable foreigner whom she scarcely knew, as she was not even aware that he was a married man. After the terrible consequences had resulted, she was extremely harsh in her treatment of the poor girl who had fallen a prey to this wretch, whom my mistress would never have known but for her cousin. It was Madame de Morvieux who forbade her seeing

her daughter again. I offered to take charge of the child, but Madame de Morvieux opposed this, and threatened to send me away, so I was obliged to submit. I knew that a day would come when my dear mistress would need me. Besides, it was Madame de Morvieux who forced her to marry Monsieur Montauron."

"My uncle took part in that also, it appears," said Savinien, in a low tone.

"Monsieur de Trémorin only knew a part of the sad truth. I came very near telling him everything, and have often regretted that I did not do so, for I am sure that had he known it the marriage would have been prevented. But what good does it do to revert to the past? Madame Montauron has expiated her fault in the most cruel manner. Her life has been incessant martyrdom for twelve years, and Heaven only knows what trials still await her. You are aware of the frightful danger to which she is now exposed. Her life is at stake, for she could never bear open disgrace. You may, I trust, be able to restore her diamonds to her and prevent an immediate exposure, but this won't save her, for she is still, and always will be, at the mercy of that man."

"That Count Aparanda? He must be an unqualified rascal."

"He is capable of any crime. He has only made his appearance in Paris to extort money from Madame Montauron."

"I thought that he had come here to bring her daughter back to her?"

"Say to sell her to her."

"What! to sell her?"

"My mistress hasn't told you all," said Brigitte. "It would have cost her too much to confess that the father of her child is simply an infamous scoundrel. But it is better that you should know what he really is, and I will tell you what he has done. Ever since my mistress has been married he has incessantly pursued her with demands for money. The pretext always was that funds were needed to support the poor child, who was living at Pisa, and my mistress was obliged to yield to this fellow's exigencies. Latterly, he has demanded more, and as my mistress could not satisfy him, he threatened her."

"How could he threaten her?"

"He threatened to take the child to her husband."

"He is a scoundrel of the worst possible kind, then?" said Savinien. "But I don't think he would dare do that. He seems to me disposed to lead a style of life here in Paris which would soon come to an end if any scandal arose."

"I think he has given up the idea of taking the little one to Monsieur Montauron. But I fear that he has another plan; that of hiding the child until my mistress gives him a sum which he has fixed upon: two hundred thousand francs."

"I am aware that, as she had not that amount by her, she was about to give him her diamonds. However, she believed that the money derived by their sale would help to make up a dowry for her daughter."

"Yes, that is what Count Aparanda declared he would do, and she believed him. He had no such intention, however, I am certain of that, and the proof of it is the way in which he has acted since he came to Paris. My mistress does not yet know where her daughter is. He promised to tell her if he were forced to leave without seeing her. He allowed her three days' grace, and, when, on the morning of the third day, Madame Montauron presented herself at the hotel at which he had put up, he had

just left. Indeed, it is all the better that she did not see him, as she would have given up her diamonds without even taking measures to protect herself from him, and without insisting upon having the letters which she had written to him restored to her."

"Ah, he has some letters, then? He would be very likely to use them, no doubt. But as for the girl I do not think that he cares to keep her with him."

"No, indeed! but he wishes to be paid for handing her over to her mother, and that is why he conceals her with so much care. Besides, my mistress is willing to buy his secrecy, and in order to do that, she relies upon your assistance, and the promises you made her."

Savinien reddened and hung his head. He greatly regretted that he had promised to play the part of an ambassador to so consummate a rascal.

"You have not forgotten, I trust," resumed Brigitte, "that you promised Madame Montauron you would question this man? But it isn't enough to question him. He wouldn't reply. My mistress, when she entreated your kind assistance, ought to have asked you to make a bargain with Count Aparanda."

"I should have refused to do so," answered Savinien, promptly.

"You won't refuse now that you know all. Her only hope is in you. She understands how repugnant it is to you to approach such a man, but the transaction will be neither long nor difficult to effect. It is only necessary to say to him: 'You shall receive the two hundred thousand francs which you demand when you shall have given up the girl and the letters.'"

"I think that I know where he has placed the letters," murmured Savinien, who remembered the Swede's visit to the Provincial Bank.

"Any other man would protest against such a proposal," continued Brigitte. "But I will answer for it that he will take the matter coolly, and instead of protesting he will make conditions. He will ask you when and how the terms of the bargain will be carried out, and you must tell him: 'Madame Montauron wishes first of all to have her daughter.' Let him begin by telling you where she is to be found."

"How will it be possible to know whether he tells the truth in the matter? Madame Montauron has never once seen the young girl since her birth."

"I saw her. I went three times to Pisa during the last twelve years. I know the girl, and she knows me. When I find her again I will undertake not to lose her. It will be enough for Count Aparanda to bring us together. When this is done, he won't be asked to do anything more till he receives the money in exchange for the letters written to him by my mistress. That day will soon come, for I hope that your friend will succeed in taking the casket away. When Madame Montauron has her diamonds, she will have some false stones set, precisely like her own. I have found a skilful and reliable jeweller. And when she has the imitation jewels, which will deceive any eye, she will sell her real stones. I have found a purchaser also. All will be ended in three weeks' time. Count Aparanda can surely wait as long as that. However, I have nothing more to say, Monsieur le Vicomte. It depends upon you to save my mistress. She is awaiting my return to know her fate, and I am awaiting your decision."

Savinien felt no eagerness to undertake this mission. Everything

about it was repulsive to him. How could he refuse, however, after having promised when Madame Montauron saw him? Brigitte's commentaries changed no part of the facts—although, they were useful, as they enlightened certain points which had hitherto been obscure.

Thanks to this truthful and faithful servant, the viscount knew that the Swedish nobleman was simply a swaggering bully, and that he had no need to be polite in dealing with him. Even a scandal was not to be feared, as Count Aparanda, by causing one, would lose all that he wished to obtain.

However, Savinien did not care to delay his own departure until the final result of the negotiation.

"I will do what Madame Montauron asks," said he, "on one condition, one only, which is that I shall be allowed to leave Paris as soon as I place her in possession of her casket."

"Nothing will prevent that. When this man has accepted my mistress's terms, I will undertake the rest. I will go to see him when you have found out where he lives."

"The question now is whether he will tell me, for I have reasons to think that he is hiding his real address. However, if he accepts the proposals which I shall make to him, he will certainly tell me how to communicate with him, and I will let you know to-morrow."

"My mistress will bless you, sir," said Brigitte.

And without another word she went off, leaving Viscount d'Amaulis very much disturbed, but less perplexed than before. He now saw what course to pursue in order to escape from the trammels which had held him in bondage ever since his arrival in Paris, and he experienced great relief at the prospect of a speedy adjustment of his difficulties.

He was expected at the Plungers' Club at five o'clock, when he was to deposit the money due to Aparanda, and he hoped to meet the blackleg who had despoiled him, as the count was not a man to defer the pocketing of his large winnings till another day. Savinien also hoped to find George Fougeray at the club, and arrange with him for the withdrawal of the casket. Three days ought to suffice for this business, as it would be greatly facilitated by the stratagem suggested by Brigitte. As soon as it was effected there would be nothing further to prevent Viscount d'Amaulis from returning to Brittany.

He dressed himself in all haste to repair to the club, and he had just placed the sum due to the Swede in his pocket-book, when a slight tap on the glass door startled him.

He had not forgotten his fright of the night before, and wondered whether this could by any possibility be Madame Montauron returning by the same path which she had taken on leaving him. This, in open daylight, would simply be an act of madness, and, besides, Brigitte had said that her mistress was ill at home and obliged to remain in her room. Savinien had drawn the curtains while the confidential servant was there, so he could not see the person who thus announced his presence or be seen by him. The viscount was now ready to go out, and might easily have slipped away by the hall, but curiosity urged him to find out who was there, and so he hastened to the window. He started back in surprise when through the glass he saw M. Montauron, smiling, and with a friendly gesture expressing a wish to enter. There was now, in truth, great reason for surprise and even alarm, for what could the husband wish with him after that interview of so delicate a character in the vaults of the Provincial Bank?

Had he changed his mind, and, instead of continuing to dissemble, resolved upon an outburst? Or, again, had he found out that Brigitte had gone to the Rue Rembrandt, and come with the intention of surprising her in secret converse with his tenant?

Whatever might be the case he must be admitted under penalty of exciting his suspicions, and so Viscount d'Amaulis opened the door at once.

"Here I am again," said the banker gaily. "I always come when you least expect me."

"You are welcome, sir," replied Savinien, somewhat reassured by this beginning.

"I was walking just now in my garden, and I took it into my head to call on you. You know that there is only an iron gate between our gardens, and I have a key to it. I scarcely thought that you would be at home, but I ventured to come, and I am glad that I did so, as you are here. I have come—excuse the liberty I am taking—to see how you are settled in my ground-floor rooms."

"I am very comfortably settled, I assure you. Do me the honour to walk in," said Savinien, who was not sorry to be able to prove that there was no one in the rooms but himself.

M. Montauron did not require to be urged, and began by going into ecstasies over the beauty of the furniture.

"It is very evident that you have plenty of good taste, viscount," said he, going from the bedroom to the dressing-room; "an experienced Parisian could not have done better."

"I did not choose the furniture myself," replied Savinien. "I bought it second-hand, and I had nothing to do with the arranging of it here. Monsieur Bouret sent me his upholsterer, who took charge of everything."

"Oh! Bouret knows all about these things! He is quite an artist, and I never fail to consult him when I purchase a painting or a choice bit of furniture. He is a gay fellow, too, and you well know that, as he passed the night with a merry set of which you formed part."

"He told you all that, then?"

"Bouret tells me everything," replied the banker. "He even told me that you lost your money to a foreigner who appears to him to be a suspicious character; and, by-the-bye," continued M. Montauron, without seeming to notice that Savinien's face had flushed, "let me remind you once more that I am at your service if you require any money."

"Thank you, sir, but——"

"Have you succeeded in recalling the word for opening your compartment?" interrupted the banker.

"No, not yet."

"Then you must need some money, as what is deposited in our vaults cannot be got out just now. It is money that you deposited, is it not?"

"Yes, yes, valuables," replied Savinien, hastily.

"Well, you cannot take them out till you think of the forgotten password, and this being the case, why do you stand upon ceremony with me? Tell me, in one word, what sum you need, and I will send it to you this evening."

Savinien thought that this was some trap laid for him by the financier, and he replied accordingly.

"I confess," said he, "that I had thought of selling some of the bonds which I have deposited at the Provincial Bank, and if the ridiculous situation in which my lack of memory places me should continue, I should

end by being very much embarrassed. But just now I shall content myself with using my letter of credit, which is far from exhausted, as I have scarcely drawn upon it at all."

"Let me compliment you, viscount," replied M. Montauron, laughing; "you show an amount of judgment which will guide you successfully through the temptations of Paris. It is certainly better to draw upon the account which you have with us than to borrow or even sell bonds."

Savinien bit his lip. He saw that the banker was right in thinking it unlikely that a man would effect such a sale when he had merely to sign his name to receive some money at once.

"But you were going out," resumed M. Montauron, "and I should be sorry to detain you any longer. Will you go by way of my garden? It is as well that you should find out the way, as I hope that you intend to be neighbourly."

"With pleasure," replied the viscount, only too glad to shorten the interview.

"You need not hesitate about leaving your window open, if you like," resumed the banker; "there are none but respectable people in the house, and my doorkeeper is very vigilant. Are you satisfied with the way in which he waits upon you?"

"Perfectly satisfied; he makes a capital valet."

Savinien was about to add that he would not require his services very long, but he reflected that this was not a time for telling M. Montauron of his intention of leaving Paris, as the banker would not have failed to ask why he was so anxious to depart. So he took up his hat and followed the financier through the superb park in which he had spent an hour with him some days before. Matters had greatly changed since their mutual explanation concerning the Rue du Helder hotel, and M. Montauron seemed to have utterly forgotten it, at least he had never alluded to it since.

"You know that we are expecting you this evening," he said, abruptly.

"This evening!" exclaimed Savinien; "I thought that——"

He was just about to make a foolish mistake, but stopped in time.

"Did you hear any one say that Madame Montauron was indisposed?" asked the banker. "She is indeed so poorly that I have countermanded nearly all the invitations I sent out. However, we shall receive a few friends, and I hope that you will be one of the number. Madame Montauron insists upon introducing you to a young lady whom she is bringing out in society, an orphan who has a dowry of five millions of francs. You will come, will you not?"

Savinien was greatly tempted to reply that he could very well dispense with the acquaintance of the young person who was so well endowed, but he thought it would seem strange if he refused.

"With much pleasure," he replied. "I was not aware that Madame Montauron was indisposed, and I feel much honoured at being included among the privileged friends who will be permitted to see her to-day."

"I cannot promise you that you will be greatly entertained," resumed the banker, smiling, "but later on we shall be able to offer you something to make up for it. My wife is about to establish a refuge for destitute young girls, and I think of giving a kind of charitable entertainment, the profits of which will be devoted to the institution. Such fairs are fashionable now-a-days, and the most stylish women take stalls at them. The park here is large enough to make our fair a perfect success. You will come, of course, and you won't regret it, for I have a surprise in store for you."

Savinien did not venture to ask what this surprise might be, but followed M. Montauron to the entrance of the flower-adorned vestibule near the main door. He then shook hands cordially with the banker, and went away quite quieted by this unexpected interview.

"It is very certain," he said to himself, as he walked towards the Boulevard Maiesherbes, "that the sky is clearing. Madame Montauron makes this worthy man believe anything she chooses to tell him. She has managed so cleverly that she won't be called upon to wear her diamonds, as she will only receive some intimate friends. I trust she will take measures to enable me to communicate Count Aparanda's ultimatum to her. The husband does not appear to suspect me now. I really begin to think that, as he said, he only went to the vaults to take out his marriage contract."

With these consoling thoughts, Viscount d'Amaulis, his head erect, sauntered along towards the Madeleine. He lighted a cigar, and this is always a sign that the "tempest in a cranium" has come to a close, just as a rainbow indicates the end of a shower.

Savinien enjoyed his cigar to the utmost. Since M. Montauron had called on him everything seemed pleasant. The poorest tobacco seemed fragrant, the plainest women pretty.

He even consoled himself for his losses at cards, as often happens to players who can pay what they lose. The first loss is hard to bear, and they don't close their eyes on the night of its occurrence, but the wound is soon healed and hope swiftly returns again. The money left upon the table is nothing more than a remembrance, and what is due is paid without regret. The past is but a dream, but the future beams ahead, and it is on that future that the gambler relies.

This was not precisely the viscount's case, as he had resolved to play no more. He had reflected as much as he cared to about the amount lost to the Swede, and did not wish to play to make up for it. It had come from the Bourse; it had gone at baccarat. This seemed natural. He even felt freer in his movements since these chance-acquired bank-notes no longer belonged to him. He could now give his mind entirely to the work of saving the woman whose defence he had so unwillingly undertaken, but which had now become his special task, and in which he greatly desired to succeed. He flattered himself that he was now on the right road. Madame Montauron had a few days' respite, and the truce must suffice to enable her champion to restore her both her daughter and her diamonds. After this nothing need prevent the viscount from going to ascertain whether there would be a good corn crop in his own fields and those belonging to his uncle. Ever since Savinien had come to Paris, he had felt alternately the influence of the golden pig dangling from his watch chain, and the blessed medal given to him by his cousin. But just now the medal proved the stronger.

Five o'clock had struck some ten minutes previously when Baron de Trénorin's nephew made his appearance at the Plungers' Club, near the Opera House.

Savinien went straight to the managers and exchanged the signature of M. de Jancigny, Secretary of the Bank of France, for his own, as it figured upon the little strips of card which Count Aparanda had deposited in the morning. A gentleman so exact in depositing his I O U's could scarcely fail to appear to receive his money promptly, and it was almost certain that he would show himself before dinner-time. Savinien went up

and down the rooms looking for him. The time was a good one for opening a serious conversation with him, as there was scarcely any one at the club. In the reading-room only a few old members were nodding over the newspapers. Further on some others were playing a quiet game of whist; while two young men were having a bout at piquet in a corner. The Swede was not visible, however.

To make up for this, Savinien discovered George Fougerey and Glébof engaged in animated conversation at the extreme end of the furthest room, near an open window. They came up to him as soon as they caught sight of him, and Fougerey exclaimed: "You have taken back your I O U's, haven't you? I also have taken mine, and so has Glébof. We couldn't do otherwise, but now that we are all right I think that we ought to investigate the play of this gentleman, who throws down twenty good cards in one deal."

"You ought to have begun by that instead of electing him by acclamation," replied Savinien.

"What can one do? He had two backers to answer for him, but those gentlemen need some one to answer for themselves, it appears. The voting was regular. But that is no reason why I should keep quiet, and, indeed, I intend to call the attention of the committee to the conduct and character of this man."

"My dear friend, you are rather late with your suspicions. Not three days ago you were singing his praises, with the sole aim of getting *me* to join the Plungers' Club. If I remember rightly, you said that he was very rich, received in excellent society in Paris, that he was going to give entertainments——"

"It is possible," interrupted George, "that I said all that, but I have changed my opinion about him. Since he won all my money from me, I look upon him as a perfect scamp."

"You are, perhaps, going too far," remonstrated Glébof. "We believe that he didn't play fair, but we have no proof of it. I, to begin with, wouldn't have paid him if I were certain that he had cheated us."

"Bless me! neither would I. But as I have paid him, I have a right to feel a grudge against him, and I should like to see him driven out of the club," said Fougerey.

Savinien's opinion of Count Aparanda was the same, but he abstained from insisting upon the matter, as he felt that the expulsion of the Swede from the club would not mend Madame Montauron's matters. On the contrary, he greatly desired that he should be near at hand for a few days, until everything was settled, and especially until the execution of the treaty which he was about to make with this dangerous enemy. After that, it little mattered when and how justice was done.

"My dear George," said he, with affected gaiety, "we have twenty-four hours allotted to us to curse all winners, but I advise you to calm yourself and take no further trouble about this man."

"That is what I mean to do, for my part," said the Russian, "and I am now going to Anita's house to request her to refrain from inviting me to any more entertainments like that of last night."

"Let me advise you to add, that if she allows Aparanda to become an intimate friend of hers, all her other acquaintances will desert her," called Fougerey after Glébof as the latter walked out of the room.

"I was looking for you," said Savinien to George, as soon as Glébof, the Russian, had gone; "I have a favour to ask of you, and I——"

"You want a hundred louis more?" interrupted George, putting his hand to his pocket, "Here they are! here they are!"

"No, no. It is quite another matter. Let me tell you."

"Tell me, by all means."

Savinien's only wish was to make himself heard, for he had decided not to wait till Brigitte had consulted her mistress. Madame Montauron, who had already advised having recourse to a friend to withdraw the casket, could not take exception if Savinien confided this mission to his most intimate acquaintance. Besides, it would not be necessary to let George into her secrets. Only his personal assistance would be required.

"One question to begin with," said he. "Are you acquainted with the system of making deposits at the Provincial Bank?"

"In the vaults, with numbered compartments, and subscription-tickets? I know all about that?"

"Good! Then you have made use of this system?"

"Of their vaults? Never in the whole course of my life, for the obvious reason that I never had anything to deposit. I leave my money with Galipot, and have a running account with him. I take it out whenever I like. That is much more convenient than locking it up in a box, and stowing the box away in a compartment in a wall."

"I won't contradict that, but would you object to hiring one of the compartments in the wall to oblige me?"

"Would I? You've chosen the wrong man. I've nothing to put into it."

"You are not obliged to put any money in it. They receive deposits there without looking at them."

"Well and good! I might deposit my dressing-case and say that it contains a million in bank-notes."

"There's not the slightest necessity for saying anything about it."

"What good would it do you for me to act such a farce as that?"

"It would get me out of a very trying position. Fancy my having placed a casket, which I think a great deal of, in the vaults of these Provincial Bank people when I first came to Paris!"

"Bouret was chattering about that at the auction rooms and at Anita's in my presence. It is he, no doubt, who persuaded you to hire one of his holes in the wall. What is there in your box? Rent rolls?"

"No. Family papers."

"Or love letters. Well, what then?"

"I want to get back my casket."

"That must be the easiest thing in the world?"

"Yes, but I want to take it back without the knowledge of these people."

"What may that be for?"

"My dear friend, Montauron and Bouret think that I have deposited valuables. If I take out my deposit they will think that I am going to sell them, and that I am on the verge of ruin. They would perhaps write this to my uncle."

"Not a doubt of it! Bouret, after seeing you play baccarat last night, can have no opinion at all of your steadiness, I'll answer for that!"

"Never mind. I would rather that you should take out the casket for me."

"But, admitting that they let me do so, they would know that you sent me to take it out,"

"No, for you would take it out without their permission."

"Come now! do you want me to steal? I warn you that I haven't the least talent in that line. Besides, having no false keys and no pick-locks——"

"There's no forcing open to be done," replied Savinien, "nor any need of a false key, as I will give you the real one."

"I repeat, then, that these gentlemen would in that case know that you sent me there."

"No, they wouldn't. You would see no one but a clerk, who, when you presented your subscription card, would show you into the vaults."

"Ah, true! I forgot that I ought to begin by 'subscribing,' that is to say, by hiring a hole in the wall to put my dressing-case in."

"You laugh, but nothing can be more serious. In the clerk's presence you need not mention my name, and nothing need be said about me."

"Well, we will suppose that I am admitted," said Fougerey. "I go to the vaults. When I am there, what next?"

"The next thing is, that, instead of opening the compartment which you hire for yourself, you look for the plate bearing number 919, you arrange the four letters which I will tell you, and which form the password, you pull the key, which I shall have given you, out of your pocket, and——"

"I put it into the lock, I open the door, I seize upon your casket, I close the place up again, I put the key back into my pocket, I take the casket under my arm, and I depart. That is what you want, is it?"

"Yes, and it isn't difficult to do." :

"Difficult, no! But it is—what shall I say?—it is a compromising matter.

"Who would it compromise?"

"Both of us, and me in particular. If I should be caught at it what should I say? I should be asked why I was fumbling about a compartment that I had not hired, and why I was taking away a thing that did not belong to me."

"It is clear that you don't know how matters are managed at the Provincial Bank. You go down alone to the vaults, and not a being disturbs you while you are there. The overseer walks up and down at the entrance, behind a grating which he opens and shuts, but he never presumes to enter when there is any one in the vaults."

"But Montauron and Bouret, I suppose, have the right to enter whenever they take it into their heads to appear. The proof that they sometimes do so is that you are afraid of meeting them."

"Yes; for the reason which I have given you," said Savinien.

"Well," replied George, "I have another reason for not exposing myself to being seen there by them. I don't wish to give any cause for slander. You are afraid of being taken to task by your uncle. I have my character to keep. That is a much more serious matter. I am neither a landowner, a viscount, nor the nephew of a millionaire. I live on my good name and my good credit. The slightest hitch would upset me. And, I repeat it, were I surprised by one of these gentlemen, the story would go the round of all Paris; it would be exaggerated, embellished as it progressed, and, at the end of the matter, I should be looked upon as a thief."

"But even supposing that so improbable a meeting took place, and even if these people took it into their heads to accuse you, which is still more improbable, you could easily justify yourself."

"Yes, by saying that you requested me to take out the casket in a clandestine manner. You can see at once what would be the effect of such a confession. Then, indeed, they would begin to accuse you of dark designs. What wouldn't be said about this box, which must needs be taken out by a friend's intervention because you dared not take it out yourself? Supposition would become frenzy. It would be given out that the casket contained the head of some woman you had murdered," concluded George Fougeray, with a laugh.

"You refuse, then, to grant me the favour I ask of you?" said Savinien in a tone of vexation.

"My dear boy, I make you judge of the case. Don't you think that if I undertook this commission, you would run much more risk than you do now of annoyance? You vainly say that nothing would happen. Something might happen, and if I were obliged to enter into explanations with Bouret, for instance, who chatters worse than a magpie, it would make the very mischief of a talk, and that is exactly what you wish to avoid. You would defeat your own purpose by employing me. Observe, pray, that I don't make the least attempt to discover why you wish to remove this deposit so mysteriously. I am not inquisitive, but others will be less discreet if they are brought into the matter."

Savinien said nothing. He was far from feeling satisfied, but he realised that George was not wrong, and he feared to insist. He had already said too much, or at least enough to excite his companion's curiosity.

"Ho-ho!" resumed George, lowering his voice, "here comes that scamp, Aparanda! Take my advice, we had better make off. I would rather not talk to him, for I could not help giving him the benefit of my personal opinion as regards his card playing. Let us go to Tortoni's and take a glass of absinthe."

"You know very well that I never drink it," replied Savinien, who was desirous of profiting by this chance of an interview with the Swede. "Besides, I shall not dine with you. Monsieur Montauron has a reception this evening, and I have accepted an invitation to it. I shall lounge about here till seven, and then go home to dress."

"You must dine somewhere."

"No. I breakfasted very late, and the reception at Monsieur Montauron's house will be over early. I shall take supper when I leave."

"Well, then, give me the preference. I shall be at the club at midnight, and I will go with you to the Café Anglais."

"We will see. I can't promise."

"Oh! all right. You are vexed because I wouldn't do what you wish. My dear boy, you will some day admit that I was right, and I hope that you will give over sulking about it. Good evening. Try to entertain yourself at your banker's reception, and, of all things, if the Scandinavian proposes a game in order to give you your revenge, remember that you had better send him about his business. At least, that is my advice, and you will do well to follow it."

With those words George departed without looking at Count Aparanda, who had seated himself near the window at the opposite end of the room.

Savinien, left to himself, thought only of approaching this individual. It was not difficult, as the latter did not appear to be thinking of going off, but apparently waited for Viscount d'Amaulis to come up to him.

They were alone together, and consequently in a situation to talk without being overheard, and it depended on themselves alone to indulge

in a long and private conversation by settling themselves in some corner. Few members came to the club at that hour and the card-tables were all in other rooms. Savinien, who was determined to bring matters to an issue with the man before him, walked straight towards him ; and the foreigner, who was observing him stealthily, came half-way across the room and was the first to speak.

"Sir," said he, with a polite bow, "you had unusual bad luck at play last night, and I——"

"You, sir," interrupted Savinien, "had unusual good fortune. But it is idle to talk about it now as I have paid what I lost. I have placed the sum which I owe you in the cash-box of the club."

"I am aware of that, sir, and have just received it. I beg of you to believe, however, that had you required some days to pay me, you would have found me disposed to wait till you were fully able to do so."

"I beg of you to believe that I should not have placed myself in a position to be reduced to asking you for time. But let us leave all that, sir. I wish to speak to you of more serious matters."

This onset, which Count Aparanda could not have expected, made him very attentive. His eyes sparkled under their black brows, and in a second his face changed completely. His mobile and expressive features assumed an aggressive look. "What can you have to say to me?" he asked coldly, but not impolitely. "I confess that having had only passing relations with you I am altogether unable to guess the subject which we need speak of together."

"Personally, I have nothing whatever to say to you, but I have been requested to represent another——"

"In conversing with me?" interrupted the count, smiling. "You come as an ambassador? This is really doing me a great honour. May I ask you the name of the person whose happy thought it was to confide I don't know what matters to you?"

"I have occasion to speak to you respecting Madame Montauron," replied Savinien, looking straight in the face of the Swede.

However, Count Aparanda did not blench, or appear ever to have heard this name before. He asked without the faintest signs of emotion or surprise: "Do you allude to the wife of a rich speculator who is, I believe, at the head of a large financial establishment?"

"The Provincial Bank. Yes."

"I don't know this Monsieur Montauron."

"At all events you know, and have long known Madame Montauron, whose name before her marriage was Mademoiselle de Louvigné."

"I remember having met a young lady of that name twelve or thirteen years ago, in society, as well as at the house of a Madame de Morvieux, who associated with the foreign colony of Paris."

"Is that all that you remember?"

"Before replying, I wish to know why she has chosen you to question me. Are you a relative or connection of hers?"

"No, but——"

"Take care, sir. By confessing that there is no relationship between Madame Montauron and yourself, you authorise me to believe in a tie of another sort."

"Take care yourself," replied Savinien angrily. "Beware lest you insult a woman whose father was the friend of my uncle!"

"That changes the aspect of things" replied Count Aparanda, still

unmoved; "if your uncle was her father's friend it is quite natural that you should take up the daughter's interests. Be good enough to tell me what you have to say."

"Can you not guess?"

"Perhaps I can. But you will admit that it is not my place to say what it is."

"Be it so. I will speak clearly then. It was my uncle, Baron de Trémorin, who, twelve years ago, brought about Mademoiselle de Louvigné's marriage."

"Very well, sir. I am beginning to understand. I was not aware that you were the nephew of Monsieur de Trémorin, who, I know, in former times introduced Monsieur Montauron to his friend's daughter. Monsieur de Trémorin, it seems, has thought fit to tell you how he was led to make this match, and why he hastened the marriage."

"No, sir. My uncle is not in Paris, and he never mentioned Mademoiselle de Louvigné's name to me. But were he here it would be with him that you would have to deal, and I am acting in his place."

"Ah! I don't understand you in the least."

"What! You don't understand that Madame Montauron has told me all, and, in Monsieur de Trémorin's absence, authorises me to defend her?"

"From whom?"

"From you, who threaten her."

"Madame Montauron has deceived you, sir. I don't threaten her."

"A discussion on that point would end in nothing. The facts are these—I presume that you will hardly dispute them—you wrote to Madame Montauron that you were about to bring to Paris a girl who has lived in Pisa from the time of her birth, and whose existence is only known to her mother and to you."

"To me, her father," quietly replied Count Aparanda.

"Since you speak out at last, I will come directly to the point," resumed Savinien. "Madame Montauron wishes to have her daughter placed in her custody."

"*Our* daughter," said the Swede, by way of rectification. "It only depended upon her to take her. She did not do so, and I had reason to think that she had made up her mind to leave her with me."

"You cannot have believed so. You knew that she was not free to do as you say, and that she could not, without time, obtain the sum which you demand of her."

"I beg your pardon! I have asked for nothing. I wrote to her that the time had come for providing for the future support of our child. She is rich, I am so no longer. I waited for her to come to me——"

"Three days. That was very little. You did not give her one hour's grace. You left the Rue du Helder hotel without leaving your address."

"You once told me that you lived there. It seems that you saw me when I was leaving it."

"Yes, sir, and an hour after you left, Madame Montauron came there to see her daughter."

"How do you know that?"

"Madame Montauron was followed by her husband, and in order to escape his pursuit she was obliged to take refuge in the room occupied by me, a room which was directly below your own."

"Ah," said the count with a peculiar smile, "I now understand how it is that Madame Montauron confided her interests to your care."

"She simply requested me to inform you," replied Savinien, drily, "that she would give you two hundred thousand francs if you restored her daughter to her."

"Excuse me! There is some misunderstanding here. This money is not for me. It is intended to be employed in constituting an income for our child."

"It would have already been handed over to you had you not disappeared. Madame Montauron was bringing you her diamonds in order that you might sell them. She failed to find you, however. Besides, you had promised that she should embrace her daughter, and her daughter never came to the Rue du Helder hotel."

"I did not promise to bring her there. I wrote to Madame Montauron—'Come, you shall see her.' This meant that I would tell her where she was and how she could see her."

"That was what Madame Montauron desired."

"Perhaps so, but I changed my mind."

"Do you mean by that, that you mean to retain possession of the child?"

"I have a right to do so. She is mine as much as she is Madame Montauron's, and more so, for she knows me only."

"Why, then, did you endeavour to get rid of her? Why did you write to Madame Montauron that you could no longer provide for her?"

"Because such was the case at the time when I wrote that letter. Madame Montauron, who has so fully informed you as regards me, no doubt told you that I had the misfortune to be ruined. I have for a long time been living on the remains of what I inherited from my father, struggling against embarrassments of all kinds, and courageously endeavouring to build up a fortune again. In so precarious a situation, I did not think of keeping my daughter with me any longer; but I have never ceased to watch over her. I have often left everything to go to visit her at Pisa, where her mother abandoned her with mercenary strangers. I may be permitted to add that Madame Montauron has never once gone there."

"You forget that she is a married woman, and besides has never failed to provide for the child's needs."

"I forget nothing. I even know that she sent to Pisa a woman in her own pay, a servant who is acquainted with all her secrets. I don't say that she could have done more, but I believe that she could not have done less. I was obliged to allow her to defray her daughter's expenses, as I was almost penniless. The same is not now the case, however; I have won money at Monaco and in Paris, and quite enough to give the girl an adequate dowry, so I no longer need any one's help for her."

Savinien looked with anxious curiosity at the man who uttered this unexpected declaration, and began to think that, after all, it was not impossible that this adventurer should have the feelings of a father.

"You see, sir," resumed Count Aparanda, coldly, "that I don't make myself out better than I am. I don't fear confessing that I propose to constitute a dowry for my daughter out of money won at cards, and I admit this to you who have lost money to me and paid me a large sum. I have no reason to keep anything back after Madame Montauron's admissions to you, and I beg you, besides, to repeat to her all that I have told you. I can do without her help, and such is my intention."

Savinien could find nothing to reply to this clear and bold affirmation. Paternal right is not to be disputed, but the use which Count Aparanda

made of it seemed to him exaggerated, and after reflecting a moment he endeavoured to prove to him that such was the case.

"Ah! sir," said he, in a milder tone than before, "I understand your wish to give your daughter what you possess; but that is no reason why her mother should not provide for her as well, and give her what she can, and it is far from being a reason why you should deprive her of the happiness of beholding her child. It is not, I presume, your intention to take the girl away with you?"

"Not at present. I am not yet sufficiently sure of being always able to provide for her. A day will come, I hope, when I shall be able to tell her that I am her father, and introduce her into society, where I hope to resume my former position. Meantime she will remain where she is, and her mother can do very well without her."

"What harm has Madame Montauron done you, sir, that you should thus drive her to despair?"

"She has done nothing. It is precisely that which I reproach her with, and why I wish to punish her. If, when I came to Paris, Madame Montauron had made haste to come to me on my first summons, I swear to you that she would not now be obliged to demand her daughter of me. You will say that her husband was watching her, and that she was not free to do as she wished. But there are no obstacles in the way of a woman who has a mother's heart. What she did after several days' hesitation she could have done at once. When she came it was too late. She had wounded me. My resolution was taken, and I left the hotel where I had waited in vain. I thought that I should hear no more from her. You now tell me, however, that she wishes to see her daughter again, and give her a dowry. You speak of some diamonds which she was bringing to me to sell. Why did not she turn them into money herself, if it was really her intention to use the proceeds of these jewels for our child?"

"She could not do so, for reasons which you can easily understand."

"Well, let her sell them now."

"She will do so as soon as she knows where her daughter is."

"This is as much as to say that she mistrusts me. She declares that she wishes to give up her diamonds. I am not obliged to take her word for that! She brought them to my room, you say? I have never seen them. Where are they?"

"In a casket which she left in my room," giddily answered Viscount d'Amaulis.

"Then she gave them to you to sell?"

"No, sir. Besides, they are no longer in my hands."

"Well, then, if you have given them back to her, let her——"

"I have not given them back to her. I deposited them at a banker's, a house that you are very well acquainted with."

The strong language used by Viscount d'Amaulis, more than once, had not disconcerted Count Aparanda. This declaration, however, seemed to startle him.

"What banking-house do you mean?" he said, eagerly.

"The one that Monsieur Montauron is at the head of," replied Savinien.

"You have made a strange choice, sir. Why did you deposit at the husband's bank the diamonds which his wife was about to sell unknown to him? That was a singular idea."

"When Madame Montauron forgot her casket and left it in my room, I did not know what it contained. I did not even know who she was. It

may astonish you, but such is the fact, and I don't mean to waste time in telling the story in all its particulars."

"I don't ask you to do so. It is enough for me to know that Madame Montauron cannot dispose of her diamonds. It is very fortunate that her daughter is able to dispense with her assistance. I was right, a thousand times right, in placing no reliance upon her promised assistance."

"You are mistaken, sir. Madame Montauron's intentions are unchanged."

"Why, then, does she not carry them out?"

"She will do so as soon as I am able to place her diamonds in her hands once more."

"Why are you not able to do so? What prevents you from taking them back?"

"I presented myself this morning at the Provincial Bank to take them out. Monsieur Montauron made his appearance at the very moment when I was about to open the compartment where they are shut up. I thought that he had his suspicions and I went away. I know that he has seen the casket in which the diamonds are usually kept. But I have not relinquished the hope of being able to take them away."

"You will not succeed. If the husband knows where they are he must have told the clerks to watch you. Every time that you attempt to go to the compartment which you have hired, you will find some one watching you."

"I can send a friend in my place."

"The friend would need to be a depositor himself in that case, for the vaults cannot be entered without a ticket. If he appeared with your ticket he would be watched just as you would be. And where will you find a depositor who will inspire you with sufficient confidence for you to tell him Madame Montauron's secret?"

Savinien hung his head and made no reply. George had just refused this delicate mission. Who could he find to replace him? The question was hard to answer.

"I am a depositor," resumed Count Aparanda, talking to himself, apparently.

"True," said Savinien, with a touch of irony, "we met at the door of the vaults. You came in a few moments before me and had just taken possession of one of the cavities in the wall. I hired the one which is next to your own."

"Strange things happen!" rejoined the count. "If on that day you had known that Madame Montauron's coffer was intended for me, you could have given it to me, and wouldn't now be trying to find a way to get it back again."

"I already knew that the coffer was meant for you. Madame Montauron, when she took refuge in my room, told me that she was bringing it to the person who occupied room 26, and when I met you in the vaults I recognised you at once as the person whom I had seen crossing the hotel courtyard in the morning. But I took good care not to give you the casket, although I did not know that there were diamonds in it."

"I understand why. You were not alone. That Monsieur Bouret who was at the card-party last night was with you, and he is extremely friendly with Monsieur Montauron, if I am not mistaken. The situation has changed, however. It merely depends upon you whether or no the casket shall pass into my hands without the knowledge of the directors of the

Provincial Bank. You are looking for a depositor who can enter the vaults and withdraw it. I am here!"

"Do you seriously suggest such a thing?" asked Savinien. "Am I to give the diamonds to you in such a way—diamonds belonging to Madame Montauron, and which represent a fortune, such is their value?"

"My daughter's fortune. Yes, sir; I am serious in what I propose. I am more serious than Madame Montauron, who affects maternal affection."

"Restore the child beforehand, or at least enable her mother to see her."

"Is this a condition which you propose to make?"

"Yes, sir. Madame Montauron wishes in the first place to know where her daughter is placed, and when she has embraced her, when she is certain that she still lives, she will sell her diamonds to constitute an income for her."

"You will never dare to reclaim the diamonds."

"I must take them back, however. I shall find some way or other. It must be done, as Monsieur Montauron has asked that they may be shown to him. When he has seen them, Madame Montauron must still have time to have false ones made to take their place. This must be done before she can dispose of the real ones. Such is the necessity to which she is reduced. You will therefore admit that she has a right to state her conditions to you, and you, on your part, have no motive for refusal. You know very well that she will not take her daughter away in spite of you. She will leave her where she is, if, as she is ready to believe, she is with a respectable person. But see her she must."

"I shall not oppose it when the dowry is paid down."

"If this is the way that things are to go on, you will never come to an understanding. You want the dowry. Madame Montauron wants the child. She even demands something more. She wishes to have back the letters which she formerly wrote to you, and which you have doubtless preserved."

"Yes, I have kept them. Not one is missing of all that Mademoiselle de Louvigné wrote to me in secret, nor of those which Madame Montauron wrote to me speaking of our child. Does she believe me capable of sending them to her husband?"

"I don't assert that she does; but these letters may fall into other hands than yours, and it is quite natural that she should ask them of you."

"It is quite natural that I should keep them. You may tell her that no one shall touch them. They are quite safe. I have deposited them in the vaults of the Provincial Bank."

"What! you chose the establishment which her husband directs?"

"You chose it to place the casket there."

"As I have already told you, I was not aware then that the name of the woman who left the casket with me was the same. You, on the contrary, knew perfectly well that Monsieur Montauron——"

"Had married Mademoiselle Aurélie de Louvigné. That is true; but I also knew that the directors of the bank don't require that depositors should show what they place there."

"I saw the enormous chest which you deposited. You will not undertake to say that it merely contains letters."

"It also contains my family papers, arms handed down to me by my father, costly books, and still more precious information, among other

things the name and the address of the person who has charge of my daughter. If I die, Madame Montauron will inherit all this. By a special clause in my will I make her heiress of my chest and all its contents, and I have taken care to indicate the word which opens the compartment where it is placed."

"That is a vile joke! You know very well that Madame Montauron would be ruined if she undertook to claim this absurd legacy; it would be enough that her husband should know of this will."

"Oh, he will not know of it as long as I am alive—and I have no wish to die. But it is as well that Madame Montauron should know of my intentions. Since you are her representative, be kind enough to tell her from me that I am willing to give her back all that she asks for; all, you understand, but only after she has given me a guarantee of her intentions as regards our child. If she has, in fact, made up her mind to dispose of her diamonds to constitute the dowry, I have told you how to get them back. You have only to tell me the password which closes your compartment. I will take the jewels out, and before selling them I will have imitation ones made, which I will send to Madame Montauron. The proceeds of the sale shall be entirely employed in buying an annuity in her daughter's name. She shall see the deed, and shall also see her daughter. I give you my word of honour as to that. Would you prefer to take out the coffer yourself? I hope, but don't believe, that you will succeed. Would Madame Montauron prefer to sell her diamonds herself? I also agree to that. I even admit that time is needed to bring all these different matters to an issue. I will wait a month or five weeks, if you like, even until the fifteenth of June. If, however, before that date I have not received the money which will secure to our daughter a competency, Madame Montauron will never hear of her again, or of me, for I shall leave France for ever. This is the last word I have to say on the subject. Be good enough to repeat it to Madame Montauron, and permit me, sir, to close this conversation."

With these words Count Aparanda turned his back upon Savinien, who did not attempt to detain him.

"That man is a scoundrel," thought Yvonne's cousin, "but he is also a great actor, for any one who listened to him would swear that he idolised his daughter and that Madame Montauron alone is in the wrong. But I have, in truth, done enough for her and I can effect no more as regards him. This evening I will give an account of my mission, and ask to be released in favour of some one else. Let her find somebody to take my place—somebody who will be, perhaps, more skilful and more successful than I have been."

II.

M. MONTAURON frequently gave balls at his superb mansion, and invitations to these entertainments, which were considered to be among the most successful of the Paris season, were eagerly sought after. They were highly thought of in the best society, for the founder of the Provincial Bank was not one of those chance money-makers who come and go like comets, leaving behind them naught but a fiery trail. His fortune, acquired by honesty and standing on a firm basis, placed him in the front rank of French financiers. His wife, through her high birth and her

acquaintance with the aristocratic set of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and still more from her personal good qualities, gave him precious help in establishing a good connection. She knew how to receive her guests, and this talent is every day becoming more and more rare. Good society is vanishing into the dim distance, and if vulgar freedom continues to spread as it does at present, behaviour suited for the tap-room will soon be the only thing that one will find at Parisian soirées. At Madame Montauron's, however, despite the manners which then began to prevail elsewhere, the tone of good society still reigned. Speculators of doubtful antecedents and chance millionaires were not admitted to her Friday receptions. Only moneyed men were seen there, it is true, but very serious men, picked out with great care, first-class bankers and directors of important companies.

It would be too much to say that this society was entertaining. But it was, at least, not tiresome. Madame Montauron did the honours with exquisite grace, and imparted a certain ease to the quietness of these receptions which would have otherwise been stiff and formal. She had even succeeded in giving them something of an artistic character. Celebrated singers and favourite pianists, actors who recited verses or played one of Musset's *proverbes*, were heard there at times. Savinien knew this, for after his first visit to Madame Montauron he had made inquiries, and on the strength of what he had heard on all sides, had concluded that an opportunity of speaking to her on the quiet would easily be found, as the attention of the other guests would be fully taken up. But now the programme of the reception was changed. The husband had said to Viscount d'Amaulis that on that evening, as an exception, he should receive a few friends of both sexes, and that a marriageable young lady would be one of them.

It would not be so easy then to speak privately, and yet Savinien had never been so desirous as now to have a final and decisive conversation with the banker's wife. It was necessary, above all things, that she should know Count Aparanda's ultimatum.

Viscount d'Amaulis put in an appearance at about ten o'clock, and found some thirty persons assembled in the drawing-room connected with the conservatory.

To his great satisfaction, his arrival passed almost unperceived. M. Montauron was in the centre of a group of men, who were discussing with great animation the politics and money matters of the day. Madame Montauron was presiding over a small circle of stylish-looking women, and talking, no doubt, of less serious matters with them.

Some of the men were walking in couples along the paths of the winter-garden; others were approaching the group of ladies with the obvious intention of joining them. No one was announced, and those who came in had the privilege of remaining unknown for a little time at least. Savinien profited by this to observe the most interesting of the guests at his ease before coming forward:

He, however, first looked at the banker, and saw with satisfaction that M. Montauron was quite unlike an anxious and jealous husband. He was indeed talking with his friends like a man whose mind was entirely at ease, and did not appear to think of such a thing as watching to see what his wife might say or do.

She was paler than usual, but Savinien had never seen her look calmer. He even detected an occasional smile as she conversed with those around her. He also remarked that she had chosen a style of dress which, while

very elaborate, did not require any display of jewels. As the season was virtually over, it was now probable she would not be obliged to take her jewels from their box till the winter again returned.

Guests entered through the conservatory, and Savinien had stationed himself near a clump of exotic plants, whence he could watch without being seen. While pursuing his observations, he caught sight of a young girl seated by Madame Montauron, and, near her, of a woman who was turning over some leaves of music spread out on an open piano.

The young girl was remarkably pretty: her style of face was Spanish, or perhaps Oriental, the opaque pallor of her complexion lending wonderful relief to her brilliant black eyes and her lips as red as pomegranate blossom. The woman near by, on the contrary, had the light hair, insignificant features, and constantly varying expression of the purely Parisian type. She strolled from the piano to the circle of ladies, laughing, gesticulating, and talking all the time. Savinien recognised her, as he had seen her that morning on Pinchard's stairs, and a few days before at the Ladies' Exchange. He even remembered her name, which George Fourgeray had told him, adding a few comments thereto. He could well have dispensed with meeting this little Countess de Gravigny, who speculated at the Bourse, and borrowed from money-lenders. He foresaw that she would be in his way, as she never stayed in one place, and would necessarily interrupt any private conversation.

However, he now found it necessary to come forward from the spot where he had remained for a time, and he made ready to cross the drawing-room to go and bow to Madame Montauron, when he was discovered by M. Bouret, who was coming from the other end of the conservatory, and did not fail to intercept his passage.

"What! all alone in a corner?" said he, laughing.

"I have just come," replied Savinien.

"So have I, and if I did as I liked I should propose to you having a smoke at the end of the winter-garden, for I foresee that we shall have singing, and I loathe music. But you, perhaps, like it, and besides it is indispensable you should go and make your bow. I'm sure I can't see, however, why it need be done. It is understood now that people can go out, English fashion, from a room, without saying good night, and one ought to be allowed to come in after the same manner, without bending one's spine and paying compliments. Well, what must be, must; let us perform our duty, then! Two together, it will be less irksome. We can sustain one another."

"Before I go to the ladies I should like to know who they are, for I don't know any one here but Madame Montauron," said Savinien.

"I know the other ladies very little for my own part. Usually, on Fridays, Montauron only receives gentlemen, and as I come on Fridays alone, I never see his wife's friends. I can, however, tell you who that beautiful brunette is with such very fine eyes. She is Mademoiselle Julia Fourcas, an orphan, afflicted with five millions, which her respectable paternal relative left her on departing this life. Can you understand how it is that so great an heiress should still be in the market?"

"Is there anything to be said against her?"

"Nothing whatever. She is charming, as you can see, and she is considered to be very intelligent. Fourcas, who conferred the privilege of existence upon her, was not of noble birth, and made his fortune on 'Change like so many others. His brother, who is the young person's

guardian, is still speculating, and must have a neat little fortune, which will, to all present appearance, also revert to Mademoiselle Julia, for the worthy man is a bachelor. I imagine, as he has brought her here to Montauron's to-night, that it is with a motive. There's matrimony in the air! Whoever marries her will be a lucky fellow. Ah! Montauron has spied us out. He is coming this way. You see that little, old fellow who is with him? Well, that is the uncle, the man who will manage the millions till the niece marries or is of age."

Savinien coloured a little. He saw that M. Montauron proposed introducing the last of the Amaulis to the last of the Fourcas, and the prospect did not entice him. It was necessary to submit, however, and he got through the matter well enough, being polite but cold; and, though he was unaware of it, this was precisely the correct style to suit the guardian, a suspicious individual, who did not like the young fellows who courted wealth.

"Are you a musician, viscount?" asked the banker, without urging the persons whom he had introduced to enter into conversation.

"A very poor one," replied Savinien. "It is just as much as I can do to sing in tune and play my own accompaniment."

"You will do us a great favour, then, if you will accompany Mademoiselle Julia Fourcas, who has a delightful voice, and whom we are all longing to hear this evening. See! Madame Montauron is looking at us, and I see by her face that she is thinking of the very thing I propose."

Madame Montauron did not confine herself to looking at Viscount d'Amaulis, as he stood talking to her husband, but rose and joined them. Her face bore no trace of the emotions of the last few days, and her manner, when accosting the pair, was destitute of the slightest embarrassment. One would have said, seeing her so calm, smiling, and playing with her fan, that not a cloud had ever risen on the happiness of her married life. M. Montauron, himself, appeared very pleased. He looked like the happiest of husbands.

"All goes well," thought Savinien, "in the best regulated family in the world, and I begin to think that there is nothing to prevent me from having a decisive confab with the lady herself. The husband looks too well satisfied to think of disturbing us. But if the poor woman knew what news I bring, she would be less calm."

"How glad I am that you have come, sir!" said she to Baron de Trémorin's nephew. "You represent youth here, and my friends have their eyes upon you. They are expecting you in order to have a little music, with or without the permission of the older people."

"My dear wife," said M. Montauron, "the older persons will be delighted to listen to Mademoiselle Fourcas, and Monsieur d'Amaulis is well able to accompany her. Ask her to sing for us."

"If you could induce her, sir, to choose something lively, I would be greatly obliged to you," said the uncle. "Julia does not care for anything but melancholy music. I have never been able to get her to sing me anything of Désaugiers' or Béranger's."

The speaker, who was fond of broad humour, spoke in a deep bass voice, which reminded one of the legendary intonations of "M. Prudhomme," and indeed he greatly resembled, physically and morally, the immortal type of Henri Monnier's creation.

"Fourcas, my good fellow," said Bouret, "you shock me! We are

not at the Caveau here, and, besides, you are fifty years behind the times. It has lately become a settled thing that there shall be nothing in the way of music but serious music. Those who, like myself, consider it to be the dreariest and most disgusting of noises, have a right to fly from it to the very end of the conservatory, and remain there till it is over."

"You are both of you profane sceptics," said Madame Montauron. "Come, sir," she added, addressing Viscount d'Amaulis; "come and let me introduce you to Mademoiselle Fourcas."

Savinien took care not to decline this honour. He was conscious that M. Montauron had his eye upon them, and that he was being put to test. To fly from the charming heiress would be as much as to say that he was afraid of exciting Madame Montauron's jealousy by paying his court to her. The whole of this little scene had probably been prepared beforehand by the husband, who thought that he was laying a trap for his wife.

"He will be well tricked," reflected Yvonne's cousin. "Jealous people are really absurd. This man mistrusts me, and has no thought of Count Aparanda. He is not even aware of the man's existence, although but a word from the count would destroy his happiness for ever. I thought from his face that his spasms of jealousy had ended. That shows that one can't trust to appearances! I must be careful what I do, as he will have his eye on me all the evening."

"You won't be obliged to listen, gentlemen," said Madame Montauron to Bouret and Fourcas, as she led the viscount away, and crossed the drawing-room with him.

Persons who are walking side by side can always, no matter how closely they may be watched, exchange a few words if not too near to those who are observing them.

"I have seen him," said Savinien in a low tone.

"Have you succeeded?" asked the lady in a similar tone.

"Not altogether. I have a proposition from him to you. But how shall I explain to you what he demands? We are watched, and it would be necessary for us to be alone."

"That is impossible just now, but I will find a moment's freedom before the end of the evening. Until then, I beg of you to pay every attention to Mademoiselle Fourcas. You need not be pitied for being called upon to do that. She is charming,"

"You are still under suspicion, then?"

"I don't know anything about it. Monsieur Montauron says nothing more respecting my diamonds. But his silence alarms me. I shall know no peace till I have them again. I live in anguish, for Brigitte told me of your failure this morning. Not another word now! Madame de Gravigny is coming towards us."

The sparkling blonde had left the group of ladies who were clustering about the piano. She had evidently recognised Savinien, and wished to speak to him privately about their meeting on the money-lender's stairs.

"My dear madame," said Madame Montauron to her, "you remember having seen Viscount d'Amaulis at the confectioner's on the Place de la Bourse, when we were taking ices there the other day?"

"Oh, quite well!" exclaimed Madame de Gravigny, "and just now, when you mentioned his name, I wondered why he did not bow to you when we were in the shop."

"I had not then had the honour of being introduced to Madame Mon-

tauron," replied Savinien. "I had arrived in Paris the night before, and——"

"Oh, yes! you live in Brittany," interrupted Madame de Gravigny. "I cannot believe it, though people tell me so!"

"But it is quite true, madame. I am only a countryman."

"You don't look like one. Mademoiselle Fourcas said so just now, and we always think alike. But, speaking of Mademoiselle Fourcas, do you know, Madame Montauron, that she says she is not in good voice to-night, and is quite unwilling to sing. We are waiting for you to induce her to do so."

"I will do so," said Madame Montauron. "I am taking Viscount d'Amaulis to her expressly so that he may accompany her."

"It is all arranged, then. But I will leave you to tell her about it. Go, my dear friend, go and persuade Julia, and I will keep the viscount here," added Madame de Gravigny, laughing, "and give him back to you presently."

Savinien, who guessed what she was about to say, bowed politely and remained, while Madame Montauron went towards the piano. Everything had gone on in the best way possible, and this separation was calculated to make the husband believe that in crossing the drawing-room they had simply exchanged some of those commonplace words which are the current coin of conversation in society.

M. Montauron and M. Fourcas had joined the serious persons present, while Bouret, who was never serious out of his office, had gone into the park, where he probably intended to have a quiet smoke, far from musical young ladies and business men.

"The proof that you are not countrified is that you are discretion itself," abruptly began Madame de Gravigny. "You met me this morning on Pinchard's stairs, and I am sure that you will not tell any one, not even Madame Montauron."

"I beg your pardon, madame, I don't know to what meeting you allude," said Savinien.

"Oh, you are *too* discreet, my dear sir! You saw me perfectly well, and so did your friend; I should be greatly obliged if you will request him to hold his tongue about it. Great heavens, yes! I *had* been to see Pinchard. Such is the result of having an avaricious husband! A woman may have a big bill of Worth's and count upon a favourable speculation to pay it, but, instead of that, find stock run down and everything flat. Then she naturally thinks of Pinchard, the fashionable money-lender. All my friends go to him at a pinch, and he helps them when they pay him twenty-five per cent. Isn't he square in money matters, that worthy Pinchard; don't you find him so?"

"But, madam, I——"

"What do you deny it for? I don't deny it! Pinchard is the man for an emergency. I don't mind heavy interest! I have a five hundred louis bet on Tristan, who will win at the Grand Prix on June twelfth, and I shan't have to pay up till June fifteenth."

Savinien did not know what to say, but he reflected all the more. He thought of this date, set by the money-lender for all the persons who had borrowed money of him, and he said to himself:

"This thoughtless creature relies upon a horse, and George upon his Ottoman stock. They may both of them be deceived."

"Don't be disturbed. I am as discreet as you are," resumed Madame de

Giravigny. "And now that I have enlightened you, let us talk of something else, if you please. What eyes Mademoiselle Fourcas has! It's really unfair to have five millions' dowry and such eyes besides. It's too much! it's unjust! Besides all that, she is intelligent, sweet-tempered, and kind-hearted. It would seem as though all the good fairies had been present at her christening, and the bad ones forgotten, for she has every good quality, and I don't know of her having a single fault. You will see for yourself, Madame Montauron is bringing her to us."

Savinien turned quickly round and saw that the moment had come for him to begin playing the part of a suitor for the hand of this young girl so richly endowed both by nature and her papa. He had but a step to make to meet her, and went forward with a good grace, mentally asking his cousin Yvonne's forgiveness for the farce he was about to take part in.

The task, it must be said, was far from painful. It the first place Mademoiselle Fourcas was a beauty of a remarkable kind, a beauty who attracted every eye, and whose claims no one disputed. She had besides what is much rarer than beauty, an attractive, sympathetic face. Under other circumstances, Savinien would have admired her very much, and would have thought himself only too happy in pleasing her; but when people are ordered to make love, they do it against the grain.

Besides, he was thinking of Yvonne. His cousin's sweet face appeared before him, no longer sad and troubled as he had seen it in his dream, but with waving hair, rosy cheeks, and that look she always had when running about the fields of Plouër, with the breeze stirring the locks on her brow. He compared her with this young girl of another race, as it were, who resembled her so little, and the comparison was not unfavourable to Mademoiselle de Trémorin. He could not however, but acknowledge that the heiress was dressed with perfect taste, and very discreet simplicity for so wealthy a young lady. Her dress did not suggest her wealth, nor yet was it like some school-girl's. Yvonne, who made her dresses herself, could not have attempted to rival her in this respect. On this ground, indeed, country girls are always beaten by Parisiennes. It must be confessed, too, that Mademoiselle Fourcas had an ease of manner only to be acquired in Paris. She had the precise demeanour that a marriageable young girl should have, without any excess of coolness or silly timidity.

In such a position young ladies just going into society often think it necessary to cast down their eyes, but Mademoiselle Fourcas did not conform to this ancient custom, and, indeed, it would have been a pity if, under pretext of modesty, she had veiled her sparkling orbs. She looked up with a frank clear glance.

Yvonne certainly never looked down too much, but had she been put to such a test as this she would, without doubt, have been somewhat embarrassed, and perhaps would have lost nothing by that, as the simplicity of innocence has its own charm.

"My dear Julia," began Madame Montauron, "here is Viscount d'Amaulis, who desires to be introduced to you, and will accompany you if you will oblige us by singing."

"What, sir, will you sacrifice yourself to please my friends and me?" said Mademoiselle Fourcas, laughing. "You undertake to perform perfect penance then, and I warn you that the gentlemen present will not thank us for our music."

"I shall be satisfied if you are, mademoiselle," replied Savinien.

"I warn you, besides, that I am going to inflict old music upon you. Do you know any of Schubert's melodies?"

"I know them by heart. In Brittany the mind is naturally inclined to melancholy. It is the effect of the climate."

"Explain to me why it is, then, that I who was born in Paris only care for the German composers."

"It is the law of contrast. The street organs here play nothing but dance music."

"According to that you ought to admire it, as you live in a château lost in the depths of a forest. By the bye, is your château really lost in the depths of a forest or not?"

"Not exactly, but it stands on the verge of a wild plain, and the wind darting among the rushes never brings us Offenbach's music, I must confess."

"That is the kind of place that I should admire of all things! But I shall never go there. My uncle won't take me anywhere but to Trouville."

"It is nearer to the Bourse," said Madame Montauron.

"Yes, and it is more *stylish*. My uncle insists upon being *stylish*. Oh, what tyranny that idea of his implies. I wish that the inventors of the notion that everybody ought to be fashionable could be made to pass their lives in ball dresses."

"Really, mademoiselle, I did not know that you had such an inclination for country life," exclaimed the fair-haired Madame de Gravigny.

"Oh, it isn't the country that I care for, it is freedom. Here my life is regulated as though I were in a convent, excepting that instead of going to my lessons, I go into society. That is all the difference. Not a moment to give to my own fancies! Now, one of the things that I like best is riding on horseback. Well! I am obliged to ride every day at the same hour, at the same place, in that eternal Allée des Poteaux, as it appears that it is not fashionable to ride in the evening, because young women with dyed hair then drive round the lake in open carriages."

"Oh! I don't care for the yellow-haired women. I go where I please," said Madame de Gravigny.

"You are married, my love," said Madame Montauron, "and our dear Julia is only escorted by a riding-master."

"Who scold; me all the time because I don't keep my elbows far enough back—it seems that it is the fashion to do so—and there again you have the word *fashionable*!"

"We are no slaves to that word in Brittany," said the viscount. "I have hunted with ladies of high rank, who wore a goat-skin over their riding-habit."

"Down there, at all events, one can gallop as fast as one likes without running into a cab."

"Three leagues of heath from our manor to the sea, mademoiselle; and our ponies in Brittany are long-winded, like Arab horses."

"Oh, how I envy you, sir! How happy I should be if my uncle would only change his mind this year, and go to that part instead of some swell watering-place!"

"We have splendid watering-places near us," replied Savinien, who was not wanting in local patriotism. "There is Dinard, for instance——"

"Too fashionable!" interrupted Mademoiselle Fourcas. "I should like to have a sandy stretch reaching far away, or some black rocks with any amount of seaweed upon them, and not a *stylish* dress to be seen: not a parasol."

"We have all that too; but——"

"What would your guardian do, mademoiselle?" exclaimed Madame de Gravigny. "What would he do in that desert, so far from the Bourse and Champs Elysées? He would die of despair, unless, indeed, he played piquet with the village priest."

"I have no hope whatever of inducing him to go there."

"Who knows?" said Madame Montauron. "Perhaps if Monsieur d'Amaulis spoke to him about it——"

She stopped here to give Savinien an opportunity to speak; but he maintained a prudent silence. Mademoiselle Fourcas attracted him greatly, much more, indeed, since he had conversed with her, but he did not care to praise the charms of Breton country life to the wealthy citizen who mounted guard over the pretty girl. Besides, he was not at all sure that Baron de Trémorin would care to see the uncle and niece with their millions established, even temporarily, upon the beach at Plouër.

"No," resumed Madame Montauron, "it would be better for Monsieur Fourcas to go there of his own accord."

"To decide him to do so, mademoiselle," said Madame de Gravigny, "you ought to sing him something from 'La Belle Hélène.'"

"That would be quite beyond me, madame."

"But now I think of it," said Pinchard's fair client, "Monsieur d'Amaulis must go out riding every day."

"In the country I do so, madame, but here I have no horses to ride."

"That is a pity! You might have met Mademoiselle Fourcas in the Bois de Boulogne and taken her part with that tiresome riding-master who insists so much upon one's elbows being kept close to one's side."

"My dear Julia," interrupted Madame Montauron, to put an end to the giddy gush of Madame de Gravigny, "will you sing us one of those songs which you sing so well? I see my husband is impatient, and your uncle is looking at us. Remember that I have promised you shall sing, and that if you don't do so all my guests will be disappointed."

"Oh, not all," replied the young girl, smiling. "There are some who don't wish to hear me at all. I see that Monsieur Bouret has vanished."

"He doesn't like music."

"Then I prefer his not listening. I am ready, dear madame."

The piano was near at hand. Savinien led Mademoiselle Fourcas towards it, and the ladies formed a circle further off. They even began talking in a low tone, as it was not a celebrated singer who was about to make herself heard. All that was proposed was a little discreet music of the kind which admits of converse in a low tone, and even moving about, if not managed too noisily.

"What one of these 'Melodies' do you suggest?" asked Savinien.

"I should like to try the 'Erl-King.' It is too high for my voice, but it suits my mood. I should like to have some one tell me a ghost story to-night."

"In this drawing-room! It is altogether too light here, mademoiselle. Such stories don't tell well with a bright light in the room. If we were at Plouër, now, at the château in the Salle des Gardes, where bats fly about at dusk, and there are owls by hundreds, we——"

"Would you let me come to your château at Plouër?" interrupted Mademoiselle Fourcas, with a laugh.

This question, which was quite unexpected, surprised Savinien to such

an extent that he could not immediately reply, and under the circumstances his lack of presence of mind was equivalent to rudeness.

"Oh, don't be afraid!" resumed Mademoiselle Fourcas, "I have no intention of forcing my way into your castle, and should prefer not to make a breach in order to enter."

"If it belonged to me, mademoiselle," said Viscount d'Amaulis at last, "I would bring you the keys of the postern-gate on a golden plate, and I would kneel on one knee to receive you; but the château, if one can call it a château, belongs to my uncle, Monsieur de Trémorin."

"Baron de Trémorin? Madame Montauron mentioned him to me. I did not know that he was the owner of Plouër. Hasn't he a daughter?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"About my age?"

"My cousin is nineteen."

"Like me! I am sure that we should agree beautifully!"

"She is very bashful," remarked Savinien. "I think that she would be a little afraid of you."

"No, for at the end of a couple of days I should be more of a country-girl than she is. I suppose that she is acquainted with Paris."

"She has been here twice with her father."

"On a trip? She has probably been taken to visit the sights, then, and has been allowed an evening at the Opéra Comique? If she came here again I would do my best to get Madame Montauron to introduce me to her, and if Mademoiselle de Trémorin made a companion of me, or a friend, she would oblige me very much; it would, indeed, be an act of charity."

Savinien was about to protest, but the heiress resumed with energy:

"Yes, sir, of charity. This surprises you because I am rich. But you don't know what a life I lead with my uncle (who is one of the best of men, but whose ideas are entirely opposed to mine), and with an English governess whom I detest. When I go into society it is still worse. I am singled out for the attentions of a set of men who care very little for me, personally. My millions are the object of their homage, and I might be hump-backed, but all the same they would declare me charming. Not a week goes by without my being asked in marriage two or three times. I advised my uncle to take a secretary to keep a list of my suitors and number them in order. But I ought not to tell you my sorrows, and I must be tiring you with my lamentations, without mentioning that everybody is looking at us, and that if I continue chattering we shall be taken for a couple of lovers. You would be ranked among the men who have their eyes fixed on my dowry. That would be dreadful! Let us sing the 'Erl-King.' It is time we did. Here is the music. You need not turn the leaves, as there are but two. Sit down and accompany me very softly, if you please, as I have not much voice."

Savinien complied without a word. He would have been puzzled how to answer this talk, which troubled him, because it awoke new emotions. He had never heard a young girl speak in this way, and this style of talking, which had shocked him somewhat at first, no longer displeased him in the least. It had the savour of fruit tasted for the first time; it was frank, and the frankness was strengthened by a force of expression which the gentleman from Brittany had not met with before. His cousin was as frank, no doubt, but she did not know how to express herself in well-chosen words. Besides, vanity had something to do with the young

fellow's pleasure. Mademoiselle Fourcas judged him worthy of receiving these outbursts of confidence, and this was such a great compliment that he could not help being flattered by it.

Let those whose hearts did not beat fast when they were but twenty-four years old, and treated as a friend by a pretty woman, throw the first stone at our hero.

He was so much flattered, indeed, that he even played false in accompanying the vocalist. She sung in a rich voice of a delicious tone—a golden voice, as it were—and she thought of the words she sung, a very uncommon quality now-a-days, when young girls sing airs as they are taught them, simply to show the flexibility of their voices.

Savinien allowed himself to dream for a moment to the sounds of this melancholy music, which bore him away to an ideal world. He seemed to be listening to a Christmas carol, such as is sung in Brittany, and heard by him in his childhood. He no longer saw the banker's guests—Fourcas the uncle, the fair Gravigny, the financiers, the people he had previously met, “irregulars” and all; he thought no more of Madame Montauron or of her casket; he forgot everything, even Yvonne de Trémorin, who sang only hymns.

The melody died away in a note into which Mademoiselle Fourcas threw her whole soul, and the viscount, suddenly recalled from the ecstatic state into which her wonderful voice had thrown him, saw that she had tears in her eyes. A murmur of approbation was heard. The women were all under the spell. Madame de Gravigny, always demonstrative, applauded as though she had been at the theatre.

The groups of gentlemen at the further end of the reception-room displayed less enthusiasm. Their talking had not ceased for a single moment, and as Mademoiselle Julia did not sing at full pitch, they hardly knew when the music ceased.

Fourcas, who did not like sentimental songs, had, in order to show his disapprobation, assumed his sulkiest look and most forbidding manner. M. Montauron, on the contrary, was radiant, and this was not the effect of the German music. He had listened but little, but he had not ceased to look at the singer and her accompanist. He had watched their demeanour at the piano, and seen every gesture, every look, even guessing their words, without, at the same time, losing sight of his wife, who had brought about this interview with all the good grace in the world. From these observations he undoubtedly concluded that Viscount d'Amaulis, free from all unlawful claim upon his heart, would ask no better than to regild his escutcheon with the millions belonging to Mademoiselle Fourcas. He now threw himself with much greater ease and unconcern into the fulfilment of his duties as host.

The persons who regularly came to the Friday receptions frequented them in order to talk of money matters, for the American habit of treating business out of business hours has, of late years, become a French habit also.

At M. Montauron's house the greater part of the talk was of money-making. It was occasionally varied with other themes, but the price of stock on 'Change was continually coming in between an anecdote about boulevardian life or a bit of theatrical news. Important financial tips always carried the day.

At the moment when Mademoiselle Fourcas was sighing forth the last notes of the “Erl-King,” the director of an important firm, who wished

to discuss some financial operations with the banker, came in, and M. Montauron, reassured as to his conjugal interests, was not inclined to lose this chance of watching over his financial interests also. He glanced at the circle of ladies over which his wife was presiding with careless ease, and, after seeing that Savinien and the beautiful Julia had begun their confidential conversation once more, he began to talk in the most animated manner with the financier who had just come in. This conversation became so absorbing that the pair went off some distance from the other guests, and finally decided to isolate themselves in the conservatory. This moment was seized upon by Mademoiselle Fourcas to put an end to a kind of privacy which propriety forbade.

"Enough of our fanciful talk," she gaily exclaimed. "Thanks to you, sir, I have been allowed to play the part of a truant from school, after a fashion, but it is time to go back to rules again. If we should begin indulging in Schubert's music again, my uncle would shut me up at home."

"Heaven forbid, mademoiselle!" exclaimed Savinien. "I should not see you again, in that case, and I hope that we shall again meet here."

"Next Friday and the following Fridays; that is the tenor of the invitations. A great fair for a charitable purpose is also being planned, and I expect to take a stall and sell cigars there. But I am really making appointments with you! This will never do! I am very giddy in my behaviour to-night, and I quite forgot to thank you."

"For what? For having played false notes while you were singing an adorable song in an adorable manner?"

"No; but for not having made love to me. I am not used to so much discretion, and I am greatly indebted to you for it."

A graceful curtsy followed this remark, which may well have had a double meaning, but Savinien had no time to ask for an explanation, as Madame Montauron now came up.

"You have greatly delighted us, my dear girl," said she to Julia. "If you don't go to Madame de Gravigny, to receive her congratulations, she will insist upon an *encore*."

"I will go to her," replied the young girl, and she tripped away as lightly as a bird flies.

"We have a few moments to ourselves," said Madame Montauron. "My husband is not watching us now. Speak, and speak quickly."

"What I have to say requires a long conversation," replied Viscount d'Amaulis.

"We have but a moment, I know," resumed Madame Montauron, "but you can at least tell me whether I may hope to see my daughter once more."

"Well, the count consents to restore her to you on certain conditions."

"Conditions! He dares to make conditions with me, he who has never done anything for our child!"

"He pretends the reverse of that, and says that he has always taken a great deal of trouble on her account, and even asserts that you have not helped him in his efforts, and that—excuse me if I repeat his words—never having seen your daughter since the time of her birth, you could not recognise her if he brought her to you."

"Coming from him, this reproach is an outrage! He well knows that I am kept away from her by ties which I cannot sever, and he well knows, also, that Brigitte went several times to Pisa. Does he mean

to try and deceive me in the matter by presenting me with a child who is not my own?"

"I cannot answer, madame; but this man has evidently some settled purpose, and I fear that your entreaties will not induce him to abandon any part of it."

"What does he demand?"

"He demands that the money intended for your daughter should be given over to him."

"To him? In order that he may deprive her of it!"

"He declares that he will use the money to buy an annuity in the girl's name, and that he will show you the papers. But he insists on handling the funds himself."

"Then you did not tell him that I had no funds?"

"Excuse me, madame, I told him all. You authorised me to do so. I explained to him what took place on the day when he left the hotel in the Rue du Helder. He now knows that you were bringing your diamonds to him, and that they were placed in a casket which remained in my hands. It is even, I believe, on this fact that he bases his demands. You intended to give him this money to dispose of as you wished it to be disposed of. He does not admit that you can have changed your mind."

"But he does not know where the coffer is?"

"He knows that I deposited it at the Provincial Bank, and that it has remained there up to the present time."

"Then he must know that you alone can take it away."

"I have tried to do so, but alas! I have not succeeded."

"Yes, Brigitte informed me that my husband came in just as you were about to open the compartment."

"Don't you think, madame, that he came there for the express purpose of spying upon me? He brought forward an absurd excuse. He said that he had come there to take out his marriage contract."

"His marriage contract! It is true that he had occasion to look it over to-day."

"Really! In that case Monsieur Montauron had a natural motive for coming, and he was not thinking of watching me. It must have been mere chance that brought him to the vaults."

"It may have been, but still I doubt it."

"Still, if this were so, there is no reason why I should not risk another attempt. Such chances do not occur twice. Indeed, I think it will be as well for me to try again, as I am in great trouble about the matter, and can find no one to take the casket away in my place."

"Brigitte told me that you intended to apply to Monsieur George Fougeray."

"I did so. I gave some insufficient excuse to him—I could not find a good one—in order to explain why I did not wish to remove this casket which I had myself deposited at the Provincial Bank, and he pretended to believe my reasons, inasmuch as he did not dispute them, but when I begged him to go there in my place, after doing certain things which I requested him to do, he curtly refused, saying that he feared that it would ruin his reputation."

"You think that he will not consent?"

"I am so sure that he won't that I shan't again attempt to persuade him, and I don't know whom to apply to. Another man has offered to do

what I asked of George Fougeray, but he is the very man of all others whose co-operation I would not for my own part consent to accept."

"A man! What man?"

"Count Aparanda."

"What! he proposed to do that?"

"To do all that was necessary to remove your diamonds. In point of fact, he could easily do so, as he has a deposit at the Provincial Bank. He has hired a compartment which is next to mine."

"What has he deposited there?"

"Letters which you wrote to him."

"Ah! this is the final blow!" murmured Madame Montauron. "My letters where my husband may find them! This is indeed fatality!"

"I don't know whether he is telling the truth on the subject," rejoined Savinien. "He declared to me, however, that the chest which contains this correspondence also contains other information which I fruitlessly asked of him, notably, the name and address of the person who has charge of your daughter. He even had the audacity to add that by his will he has left this chest to you."

"He must have made up his mind to ruin me utterly!" said Madame Montauron.

"I remarked to him that you could not take possession of this legacy unknown to your husband. He replied that there would be no reason to do so for a long while to come, as he expected to live to a very old age, but that, for the present, you must sell your diamonds in order to assure your daughter's future. Without that he refuses to give her back to you. And as he is convinced that I cannot take the jewels away, he asks me to tell him the pass-word. He says that when once he knows it he will take the casket away without the knowledge of anyone at the bank; and, indeed, he could do so if I consented to what he demands. The clerks never saw him but once, and could not have paid any particular attention to him. Monsieur Montauron has never seen him that I know of. Monsieur Bouret, who met him last night at a card-party, scarcely knows him, and has no idea that I have anything to do with him, apart from the card-playing. Nothing, then, need prevent him from entering the vaults. He has not been mentioned by your husband to the head-clerk, and he can go in like any one else, and, once inside, the overseer at the gate will not know whether he opens compartment No. 918 or 919. Your casket can thus reach Count Aparanda without difficulty."

"But my daughter?" said Madame Montauron, in a voice choked by a stifled sob, "when shall I see her?"

"He swears that he will restore her to you, as well as your letters, when she has this annuity assured to her. He even undertakes to have false jewels made for you to show instead of your genuine diamonds."

"Do you advise me to accept this offer of his?" asked the banker's wife.

"No," replied Savinien, with decision. "I have no confidence whatever in the man."

"But if I refuse, what then?"

"He will not do anything. What he wants is the money for the dowry, and he will wait till he receives it from you."

"How long will he wait?" asked Madame Montauron eagerly.

"Till the fifteenth of June."

"And what will he do after then?"

"He will go away never to return, and without telling you where to find the child."

"The wretch ! Then my only hope is in you."

"And I, unfortunately, am unable to help you."

"Why ? A fresh attempt may succeed ; you said so but a moment ago. It is by no means certain that my husband thought of spying upon you, and to avoid the danger of meeting him you can choose a time when you know he is elsewhere detained."

"It will be very difficult to be sure as to that."

"There are days when all his time is taken up in attending the board of directors. When these meetings occur, I always know of it the day before. I will let you know. I will inform you when you can act in all security."

"Excuse me, madame," said Savinien, who was very desirous of freeing himself from all further responsibility, "I have done all I could to serve you, but in the position in which we now find ourselves——"

"Go to Mademoiselle Fourcas at once, I beg of you," interrupted Madame Montauron. "My husband has returned from the conservatory."

And without giving Viscount d'Amaulis time to add another word, she left him and went towards a financier, who had not yet paid his respects to her, but was now being led forward by M. Montauron. Savinien was obliged to return to Madame de Gravigny, who was awaiting him in order to launch him into a flirtation with the young heiress of five millions. The countess had discovered that he had made an impression in that quarter, and conjectured that if she helped to bring about the match, she would further her own interests.

Yvonne's cousin did not attempt to draw back. The chat with the heiress, which the little countess dexterously favoured, gave him a deal of pleasure, and when he returned home he was much less desirous of going back to Brittany.

III.

It is much easier to form a wise resolution than to keep it. Savinien d'Amaulis had made up his mind to return to Plouër, and before Friday, the reception day, his plans were all made to start on the morrow or the day afterwards at the latest. And yet two weeks after the reception at which Madame Montauron had introduced him to Julia Fourcas, the young fellow was still in Paris.

This delay would have been unpardonable had he been expected at the château, but he had never spoken of returning in his letters, so as to avoid giving his reasons for going back. His uncle Trémorin did not expect him before the autumn, and if his cousin Yvonne longed in the depths of her heart to see him again, she did not dare to say so in the postscripts which she always added to her father's letters to him. Nothing, therefore, obliged Savinien to set out for Brittany, and the hurried departure for which he had made a few hasty arrangements seemed to him much less desirable than before.

Whence came this change in his ideas ? He would have been at a loss to answer the question. The motive which he assigned to it in his own mind was that Madame Montauron needed him, and that he could not abandon her till he had restored the casket to her. He had promised

to do this, and, after all, it was his fault if the casket was shut up in the vaults of the Provincial Bank. It was his duty then to repair his blunder by taking the unlucky deposit out, and an opportunity for doing so had not yet been offered.

It had been agreed that Savinien should take advantage of the first enforced absence of M. Montauron to venture upon another visit to the bank, and he expected to be apprised of the opportunity by the faithful Brigitte.

Now, Brigitte, whom he frequently saw, had not yet made any such announcement. Not only was there no meeting requiring the financier's presence, but, contrary to his habits, he spent every day at the bank. He seated himself at his desk in the morning, and did not leave till the bank closed. So it was simply impossible for the viscount to go to the vaults without being surprised there, as he had been on the former occasion.

M. Montauron's present course was not of a kind to reassure his wife, for it seemed that he had taken up his post at the Provincial Bank for the sole purpose of watching over a deposit concerning which his suspicions were excited.

However, he had never been more affectionate in his manner towards his wife. He gave up nearly all his evenings to her, and never again mentioned the subject of the diamonds. It seemed, indeed, as though he endeavoured to banish all anxiety from her mind. She had not, however, received any company for a fortnight, as she was indisposed, and the season was now too far advanced for the banker to propose that they should give a ball. The charity-fair which was to be held in the park would not require any display of diamonds on her part. Women of good society do not wear diamonds by daylight.

There was nothing, then, to be feared as to her being obliged to wear them, but there was the overhanging threat of Count Aparanda, that he would disappear after the fifteenth of June without telling her what he had done with her daughter. Brigitte declared that he was fully capable of carrying this threat into execution if his demand for the two hundred thousand francs was not complied with, and as she firmly believed that he would keep the money for himself, she thought of thwarting his odious plans by having recourse to special means. Everything was allowable, she maintained, against such a man, and she had conceived the idea that he ought to be watched by a secret agent who, for a fixed sum, would inform those who paid him of all his movements. Brigitte thought that Count Aparanda must go from time to time to see the child whom he declared that he had placed in the charge of a Swedish lady. It was, therefore, only necessary to follow him about in order to discover where this lady lived, and then to mount sentry, so to say, over Madame Montauron's daughter.

But either the private detective employed was unskilful, or Count Aparanda had found out that he was watched, for nothing had yet been ascertained. The count led the most regular life imaginable. After his conversation with Viscount d'Amaulis, he had taken up his quarters at the Grand Hôtel, in a room which he had already engaged, but had not, till then, chosen to live in. He was in the habit of going to the Plungers' Club for his meals, the fare there being excellent, and he strolled on the boulevard or in the Champs Elysées. He also paid frequent visits to Anita, the blonde, who appeared to take up some of his time. In a word, he passed his days as do most foreigners having money to spend, and

who come to Paris to amuse themselves, without wishing to make aught but transient acquaintanceships.

The daily reports given to Brigitte by the private detective contained nothing which enabled the mother to find her child. The nurse, however, did not allow herself to become discouraged. She even thought that she would ultimately succeed, and when she saw M. d'Armaulis she never failed to entreat him to continue assisting her mistress till the casket was recovered. Savinien remained, and not reluctantly.

Since everything had assumed this commonplace quietude, he began to see the advantages of the absolute independence to be found only in Paris. He might arrange his plan of life as he pleased, and avoid whomsoever he chose to avoid. The first person from whom he escaped was, naturally, the suspicious character whom circumstances had thrown in his way. He had nothing further to do with Count Aparanda. He had paid his IOU, and had seen him, once for all, on behalf of Madame Montauron. In order to avoid meeting him again, he abstained from going to the club, or if, by any chance, he went there, it was at hours when he knew the Swede would be away.

The result of this, as may be supposed, was that he saw George Fougere less often, and although their friendship had not grown cold, Savinien was not sorry to escape from the giddy whirl into which the young financier would have led him. Besides, George had again begun to speculate, and gave most of his time to business—without attempting to lead Savinien into a similar course—and this perhaps because he no longer needed him to bolster up his credit on 'Change.

It will easily be believed that Yvonne's cousin had never again set foot in Anita's house. The mansion on the Boulevard Malesherbes had not proved lucky to him, and the people who frequented it did not attract him, especially Count Aparanda, who, as he learned through Brigitte's private detective, was now altogether in the actress's good graces.

As for M. Bouret, Savinien still met him, indeed, more often than he liked, for Montauron's double went everywhere and still persecuted the viscount with his attentions. Savinien had, besides, had an interview with him on receiving a fresh amount on his letter-of-credit, which was now nearly exhausted, for he had insisted upon returning the hundred louis borrowed from George. He did not wish to leave any debts behind him on returning to Plouër, and to prevent this he had set aside the sum which would be due to M. Montauron for six months' rent. This was an undue precaution, perhaps, as the famous Hôtel Drouot furniture was worth a larger amount, and he did not expect to take it with him to Brittany. But Savinien had learned from experience to guard against unforeseen events.

His connection with M. Montauron had assumed a very satisfactory aspect to all appearance. They saw each other occasionally, but not very often, sometimes in the park where the banker frequently received his intimates, sometimes in the viscount's rooms in the Rue Rembrandt, where the financier occasionally called unexpectedly. They had never alluded to the past, however, nor to Madame Montauron. But the banker frequently spoke about Mademoiselle Fourcas' attractions, and advised his young friend to follow up the acquaintance started in his own house with the guardian, offering to accompany him on a visit to the important personage who had at his disposal the hand of a niece five times a millionaire. Savinien showed little eagerness to follow this advice, however,

but he did not contradict the eulogiums bestowed upon the incomparable Julia, for he thought her charming, and she came into his mind much oftener than he liked. He even asked himself where it would be possible for him to meet her without paying her attention, which appeared to him unadvisable.

Ought it to be thought from all this that Viscount d'Amaulis was in love with Julia Fourcas? He would have been puzzled to say how far it was so. What he could not deny was that he often thought of her. She interested him as a new country interests a traveller. This, at least, was his own explanation of the feeling which she inspired, and as curiosity is a blameless passion, he had no scruple in satisfying his own. This it was not easy to do, however; a young girl is better guarded in Paris than anywhere else, for the chances of seeing her are very rare.

In a provincial town people of the same standing in society have the same habits and connections. They meet at every turn, at the houses of their mutual friends. There is the favourite promenade, the walks and public gardens—only the name varies—and it is enough to go out at a certain hour and direct one's steps to a certain spot to meet the young lady of whom one may be thinking, and exchange bows, looks, and even words, when her parents or relatives permit it. In Paris, however, there must be a neutral ground, unless one intends to begin the romance at the end, that is to say, by plumply and plainly proposing matrimony, which was certainly not Savinien's intention.

He wished very much to see Mademoiselle Julia again, but had no desire to pay a visit to her uncle Fourcas. He would willingly have accepted an invitation from him, but this wealthy citizen never held a reception. Dinners were the only entertainments he gave, and Savinien had no reason to expect an invitation unasked, while he could not, with propriety, intrigue to obtain one. He would even have thought himself called upon to decline the honour, had it come after a single interview.

Madame Montauron having ceased to receive on Fridays, for the time being, a second interview was not likely to occur again, unless it were brought about by the steps advised by M. Montauron, steps which Savinien considered might lead too far. He had informed himself as to the habits of the guardian, and he knew that while allowing his ward great liberty he did not take her often into public.

Theatres wearied this business man, and, besides, the season was drawing to a close. Foreigners alone braved the heat to go and see a play. Savinien thus had no chance of seeing Mademoiselle Julia in some box, with her governess on one side and her uncle on the other. In such a case, custom would have allowed him to leave his own seat, and call upon her between the acts.

There was, no doubt, an exhibition of paintings in the Champs Elysées, and Savinien had gone there more than once, choosing the most fashionable days to do so, but either fate had ill-treated him, or M. Fourcas held art in contempt, for the viscount had not met Julia there.

This was not an irreparable misfortune, however, and Yvonne's cousin had finally resigned himself to his disappointment. He had even begun to look elsewhere for some pastime, as he could not live like a hermit while waiting for Madame Montauron to dispense with his assistance.

He had begun to visit his relations in the aristocratic Faubourg St. Germain. He had frequently visited the Viscountess de Loudinières,

who had vowed that she would marry him to one of her friends if he would but pass a winter or two in Paris. The aristocratic heiresses whom she patronised had already gone away, and would spend the summer on their estates. For the time being, then, Savinien did not risk anything by frequenting the house of this lady, who had a positive passion for making matches, and who welcomed him warmly, besides being an agreeable companion in spite of her advanced age.

His other cousin, the Marchioness de Laffemas, who lived a very retired life, made much less of him. With her, conversation consisted of the dreariest commonplace chatter. Every time he saw her he was obliged to listen to the genealogy of the Amaulis family, to which she belonged, and when she had gone over the subject of their intermarrying with the Laffemas, she would retire to feed her pug-dog, who was dying of old age.

Her son Adhémar was not at all like his mother, however, and Savinien greatly preferred him. At first he had been repelled by his mania for sport, but little by little he had become accustomed to it, and was now fond of the races himself. Now, Savinien had no aristocratic prejudices whatever, and had shown this by keeping up his acquaintance with George Fougeray, who had no relations, either far or near, among the nobility. But a man cannot belong to the time-honoured nobility of Brittany without being in some degree influenced by the fact. Born with old royalist blood in his veins, and brought up by his uncle Trémorin, who was very absolute in everything, Viscount d'Amaulis could not depart from the laws laid down by his ancestors as to social matters, and he had a natural preference for the companionship of those who were his equals in birth.

No doubt his stay at the Rennes law-school had sufficed to imbue his mind with progressive ideas, and his sojourn in Paris was not calculated to bring him back to the feelings of feudal times, as since his arrival he had found himself among people who were altogether on a footing of equality. Circumstances had thrown him into a world in which *parvenus* and girls born in a doorkeeper's lodge were frequently met with in conspicuous situations. He had been to the Bourse, and had admired the wit and beauty of Mademoiselle Julia Fourcas, the daughter of a moneyed man. But he felt much more at ease with the Marquis of Laffemas than with George's friends, and he and his cousin agreed on many subjects, though not on all. He felt grateful to him for treating him as a relative, although he had come straight from a country home, and had not fortune enough to make up for his countified blunders. He had been especially flattered by being proposed at the Jockey Club, and although he did not expect to make frequent use of the advantages arising from being admitted into this privileged circle, he still greatly desired to become a member.

Even though a man be destined to live in a retired château, he is not sorry when he visits Paris to be able to show himself upon the balcony of his club-house, and to have at the races a seat on the stand reserved to the members of the "Jockey." It was for these reasons that Savinien d'Amaulis now saw Adhémar de Laffemas almost every day, and the latter made no small sacrifice in giving up a portion of his time to him instead of disposing of it in his usual way.

Nothing, certainly, is less easy than to accommodate one's self to a friend who is not acquainted in one's own social circle. The marquis, however, had found a way which was not within the reach of everybody. He had half a dozen horses in his stables, without counting, it is needless to say, the respectable looking old mares which dragged his mother's carriage

about, and there was not a morning that he did not take a ride in the Bois de Boulogne.

This ride was almost indispensable in the sporting world, and M. de Laffemas was among those who appeared most often along the fashionable Bois. He had not at first asked Savinien to accompany him. A man who has a good knowledge of horses, and is fond of them, does not lend his own animals to the first comer, nor even to a friend, unless he be certain that this friend knows how to ride. However, the marquis had taken an ingenious way to find out whether Savinien had any knowledge of horsemanship, and had done this without wounding his young cousin's self-love.

Under pretence of asking his advice as to a horse for every-day use, which he had just bought, he had begged him to try it in the grounds adjoining the marchioness's house. The result had been altogether satisfactory. Savinien was not what is called a showy rider, with that certain easy way of sitting, which is acquired by frequenting fashionable rides, and which very poor horsemen often possess. But his hand was steady, his knees like steel, and it was impossible to throw him. After the first test, Adhémar saw that he could trust him with his best horses without any risk of their being spoiled. So he now proposed that they should ride out together, and this offer was joyfully accepted by Viscount d'Amaulis, who at Plouër passed half his time galloping across country. Then, as a real gentleman never does things half-way, M. de Laffemas sent a horse and groom to M. d'Amaulis' door every day.

Savinien had thus the pleasure, which he highly appreciated, of riding a fresh horse each morning, and he did so to his heart's content. He met his cousin in the Bois de Boulogne, and after a long ride, of which they varied the pace, they returned to the house in the Rue de Varennes, where the dowager marchioness sometimes invited the young nobleman from Brittany to remain and breakfast with her.

It was in this way that Savinien, one day late in May, happened to be coming down the Avenue de l'Impératrice at a rapid trot, riding a chestnut, which he sat for the first time, and which he had not yet thoroughly broken in. This chestnut was a half-bred, which the Marquis Adhémar had recently purchased, and which he did not ride, he said, without being on his guard, as it was frisky. It had even a trick of shying, which is a bad vice for a saddle horse. He had kept it till the last in the trials to which he had subjected his young friend Viscount d'Amaulis, and it was not without some apprehension that he had trusted it to him.

Savinien, warned beforehand that he had to deal with an animal which was hard to manage, was careful not to decline the test. He felt that he was fully able to subdue the beast, and was not sorry to be able to show his cousin that Breton gentlemen are not afraid of horses which are difficult to manage. After a short conversation with the groom, in order to find out the disposition of Trevelyan—such was the name of the troublesome steed—the viscount boldly mounted him before the door of the house in the Rue Rembrandt, which, it being an early hour, was almost deserted.

The doorkeeper, who was also Savinien's valet, and who at the moment was smoking his pipe in the courtyard, was present, however, and beheld the viscount and his horse struggling for mastery. The struggle was a warm one, but the rider succeeded in conquering, although he was not accustomed to the slippery saddles which are the fashion now for stylish riders, and which dispense with the pad supporting the top of the knee. Riders of high fashion would laugh at its use at the present time.

At Plouër, however, Savinien had been in the habit of using a good old-fashioned saddle, upon which he was literally screwed down, so that the first few starts of the chestnut somewhat jostled him, but he soon recovered a firm seat. From his earliest childhood he had galloped about upon bare-backed ponies with long manes, such as belong to Brittany, and his mad races across country had accustomed him to the most reckless riding. So he soon brought Trevelyan to terms and made him proceed, not without curveting, however, towards the Boulevard de Courcelles, intending to finish subduing him quite at his ease.

He wished to do this before reaching the Bois, where the crowd would have hampered him; and as the tricky animal still manifested an intention to misbehave himself, Savinien, when he reached the ascent of the Avenue de Wagram, let him go at full speed. At the Arc de Triomphe, Trevelyan, quite blown by a gallop at a rapid rate up this steep road, already began to be more reasonable, and a trot along the Avenue de l'Impératrice calmed him completely.

When he passed the Port Dauphine he was as meek as a lamb. At this point the viscount knew which way to turn, being already Parisian enough to know the good roads. It was nine o'clock, and in the morning no one rides near the lake or the Acacia Avenue. All riders who conform to the rules of fashion take the Allée des Poteaux, and carriages proceed along the road to the Pré Catelan. The two avenues cross at a few hundred yards from the entrance of the Bois, and agreeable meetings often take place at this juncture. The riders on horseback keep along beside the carriages or traps driven by ladies themselves. Sometimes ladies alight, and the riders do the same, and walk in couples over the grass or under the trees. All this affords a charming picture to the looker-on. And as many people are acquainted with each other, conversation goes on as freely as in a drawing-room.

However, this freedom of intercourse does not begin till between ten and eleven, and when Savinien appeared on the privileged road there were none but some sober-minded people riding for the pleasure of riding rather than to show themselves. There were a few ladies, but they passed rapidly by, profiting by the free state of the road to indulge in a rapid canter. At a later hour, when the avenue is crowded, it is necessary to walk your horse. The viscount, who liked to ride fast, did so early.

The two cousins always ended by joining one another, but they had no fixed place for meeting, and as Adhémar de Laffemas came from the Rue de Varennes they did not enter the Bois de Boulogne on the same side. Savinien was thus alone during the first part of his ride, not having met such acquaintances of his as might be in the Bois. Those whom he saw most frequently since his arrival in Paris were not in the habit of riding in the morning.

However, this momentary isolation did not prevent him from looking at the men and women who rode by. It entertained him to study their way of mounting and the odd habits contracted in Paris, including the practice which has originated, who knows how, of riding with your arms stuck out, if you are a man, and with your elbows drawn close to your sides, if you are a woman, and this even to the degree of making a hollow between the shoulders.

M. de Laffemas could have told the viscount the names of almost all the equestrians, but he almost always joined him before the crowd appeared, and with one accord they usually rode, to exercise their horses,

in the deserted avenues which extend towards the Château de Madrid. Riding was the marquis's passion, and the viscount had the same taste to a marked degree. Savinien would not have been sorry to serve his apprenticeship under the patronage of the brilliant Adhémar in the society which he elbowed in the Bois, but without mingling with it, and he hoped that some day or other his cousin would tell him all about the people who changed like kaleidoscopic views all along the Allée des Poteaux.

On the day in question it was beautifully clear, and any number of riders had gathered together. It had rained the night before, the leaves freshened by the shower still cast a few drops upon the emerald turf, and the sky, veiled by a slight mist, had a silvery tinge. It was one of those spring mornings which bring thoughts of green fields to the most city-hardened brains in Paris. And the last of the Amaulis was obliged to confess that the moors of Plouër lacked the charms of this wood laid out so skilfully for the pleasure of the rich.

He rode along more slowly than usual, giving Trevelyan, whom he had well in hand, full liberty to curvet as he pleased, so that the animal made the mud fly in all directions. He thus passed down the Allée des Poteaux in its entire length, after which he indulged in a trot to Madrid and then galloped along the Allée de Longchamp, which took him beyond the Pré Catelan. These exercises lasted an hour, after which Savinien thought of returning to the more frequented paths, and so letting Trevelyan remain at a walk, he suffered him to enjoy his well-earned rest.

At the Carrefour de la Croix he finally met his cousin Adhémar, coming quietly along, mounted upon a bay horse. The marquis had some resemblance to Don Quixote, but he was a sort of English-looking Don Quixote, with very long whiskers of a somewhat too decided ruddy hue. Still he had an air of distinction, and his face was not wanting in expression, although he did his best to imitate the English cast of countenance by hiding all emotions.

"Good morning, Savinien," said he, "I am late to-day. Would you believe it, my dear cousin, my mother sent for me at seven o'clock this morning to solemnly inform me that she had made up her mind to have me married and settled before autumn, and she added that I must go away this summer to visit the relations of my intended bride in the country? I got out of it by making a promise which I have not the smallest intention of keeping. But how did you get along with Trevelyan?"

"Splendidly, cousin," replied Savinien, smiling as he saw a sarcastic look come over the marquis's face; "he is like a lamb."

"You must be joking."

"Not at all. He made a little fuss at first, but that was soon over. You see, he obeys my hand and my knees."

"It is astonishing. I must compliment you. If he did not throw you at the first start it must be because you have the devil of a grip. I confess that I was rather anxious. But I see that you can ride fully as well as I can. Shall we go up the avenue and see who is out this morning? I will tell you no end of anecdotes about the riders. Besides, I must talk to you about your election at the club. Would you believe it, my dear boy, that within the last two days your chances have greatly diminished? Yes, my dear fellow," resumed M. de Laffemas, "there are persons at the club who are trying to prevent your being elected."

"I am surprised to hear it!" exclaimed Savinien. "I certainly did

not expect to be elected by acclamation, but I thought that I should derive a certain benefit from my very insignificance. I don't belong to any guild, for the excellent reason that I have but recently arrived in Paris. I ought not to have any enemies."

"People always have enemies."

"Didn't you say yourself that my being a new-comer gave me a better chance?"

"Yes, of course. Unfortunately, you have ceased to be unknown to some among us."

"How can that be? Excepting yourself, my dear Adhémar, I have not seen a single member of your club since I came here."

"Several have inquired about you. It is strange, is it not? What would you think if I told you that they already know where you visit? You cannot imagine how Paris is like a petty country town in its gossip. Society here is subdivided into a certain number of fractions which ignore one another. But in each one of these people talk against the remaining fractions just as they do at Saint-Malo or Dinard. Besides, Viscount d'Amaulis isn't a nobody. Several members know your name, and, on seeing it on the list of candidates for membership, they inquired what representative this was of one of the oldest families of western France."

"But what objection do they make to me?" asked Savinien, somewhat offended.

"Oh, nothing that affects the honour of your name! It was at first objected that you are not rich enough."

"I should understand that objection if it were a question of marriage."

"My dear fellow, the objection has its force in the present case. When you belong to the Jockey you are obliged to keep up a certain style, or at least to live in a certain way which necessitates considerable expenditure. Fortune is a guarantee against certain failures in this respect which occur only too often. It is needless to say that I had no trouble in proving that your means are of much more solid foundation than those of many members of the club with whom I am acquainted. Your fortune is in land, and when a man owns land he holds out for a long time."

"Especially when he only comes to Paris occasionally, and as I have less than ever any intention of living here for good, I think that I can guarantee that I shall not come to ruin."

"Between ourselves, this isn't certain. I remember country gentlemen whom I have seen arrive in Paris for the races in April, and who have left in June after the Grand Prix was over. They had, meanwhile, had time to reduce themselves to utter poverty. But let us leave that matter, and allow me to repeat what some ill-disposed persons say. At the head of them there is a booby named Pontamur, whose special charm is his happy faculty for keeping out new members."

"I heard of him quite recently. He wished to be invited to a card-party at which I was present, but missed his aim."

"It is perhaps for that reason he has a grudge against you. It is certain that he set afloat the report that you frequent very objectionable society, money-brokers, and third-rate women of gay behaviour. And, between ourselves, there is some truth in what he says. For instance, that man who took you to Pinchard, what's his name? I always forget his name."

"George Fougeray."

"Well, he is not thought to be in a very clearly ascertained position. Nobody knows exactly what he lives on."

"He lives on what he makes, and he makes it honestly."

"I don't doubt it, but that is a somewhat vague profession, you know. You will tell me that many people in Paris are like him. That is true, but they have no friends in clubs of high standing."

"My dear cousin," replied Savinien, very firmly, "George Fougerey was at the same school with me, and ever since I have been here he has shown me the utmost cordiality. I was perhaps wrong in living his life for a few days, and I now see him much less often. But I have nothing serious to reproach him with, and if he were attacked in my presence, I should think it my duty to defend his character."

"You would do right, cousin. A man should always defend his friends. But I must tell you all that I heard. Are you not also the friend of a Monsieur Bouret?"

"The friend? No! He is Monsieur Montauron's partner. Montauron is my uncle's banker. I only know him from presenting my letter of credit to him. If I have met him since, elsewhere than at his office, it is not my fault, I beg you to believe. He goes everywhere."

"And especially to see Anita, that madcap of the Boulevard Malesherbes."

"He was there, it is true, on the night when I reluctantly went there myself."

"And were very neatly fleeced. You see how things come to be known! I could tell you who lost, as well as the name of the pretty fellow who robbed you all."

"He is a foreigner—a Swede."

"Count Aparanda, to be sure! He has a well-established reputation as a mere adventurer. It appears that he is an intimate friend of Anita's. I should not be much surprised if he plotted with her to entice you into her den, and pick your pocket."

"You think that he cheated, then, and that this woman is his accomplice?"

"It is quite possible."

"She has a superb place, however, and nothing there suggests a gambling-house."

"One cannot trust to appearances."

"This man Pontaumur, who has taken the trouble to inquire about me, was, however, himself very desirous of joining the card-party at her house."

"Pontaumur wouldn't care to go there except to win money, or lose it, if he fancied doing so. But the chief subject of reproach against you, cousin, is that you belong to some club or other, the name of which I forget."

"The Plungers' Club. What harm is there in belonging to that? Cannot one belong to more than one club, or to several?"

"Certainly. Even if you already belonged to the Jockey you could go round to all the Paris gambling-houses, and no fault would be found, as a passion for play is supposed to account for that. But when you aspire to a club like ours, you should not begin by belonging to a second-rate place like the Plungers'."

"I did not choose it, I assure you, and had no thought of belonging to it. Fougerey had me elected without saying a word to me till it was

done, and then I did not like to refuse. I have not gone there a dozen times, and shall probably never set foot in the place again. But, my dear cousin, as I should be very sorry if my admission give you the least trouble, I beg you to withdraw my name."

"Not at all! not at all! I shall keep it on the notice, and I answer for it that you will be admitted. Pontaumur and two or three other idiots of the same sort will put in some black balls, which will be crushed by a majority of white ones. It would be a pretty stir up if one of my nearest relations was blackballed! If such an affront as this were put upon me, I should send in my resignation. Be easy in your mind, my dear Savinien; you shall be elected, and on the day of the Grand Prix you shall be seated in our stand. Meantime, shall we review the frequenters of the Allée des Poteaux? We cannot trot now without an accident, and if you were less firm in your seat I should be uneasy, for Trevelyan is deucedly caperish. However, with you he cannot misbehave himself."

Talking as they rode, the cousins had now reached the point where the road to the Pré-Catelan cuts across the route patronised by equestrians. Carriages of all kinds, phaetons, waggonettes, and victorias were coming up in crowds, several driven by women who were all of good society.

There was but one actress or "irregular" to be seen, and this was Anita, who must needs smile upon the viscount in the most engaging manner. It was easy to see that she would have liked to stop and talk to him, but the cousins preferred to ride on.

She was on horseback, escorted by a bearded individual who was also mounted, and whom Savinien would have greatly preferred not to meet, but who bowed to him. This bow threw the viscount into a state of extreme perplexity. He would have liked to pass it by unacknowledged, but that would have been cutting a man who, personal reasons apart, might greatly harm Madame Montauron. Besides, there was no reason for returning a polite bow by marked rudeness. When a man has consented to sit down and play cards with another, he cannot well pretend not to recognise him, unless the man in question be a blackleg; and although Count Aparanda had not a good name exactly, he was not yet "disqualified," as is said in sporting parlance. All this flashed through Viscount d'Amaulis' mind as he ended by returning the bow. His cousin, who was observing him stealthily, saw him hesitate, and turned in his saddle to see whom Savinien had honoured by his recognition.

"Who is that *rastaquouère*?" he asked, scornfully.

Amaulis, who had not seen Gil Pérès play the Brazilian at the Palais Royal theatre, did not understand the word, but he guessed its meaning.

"It is the man of whom you were speaking just now," he answered with some embarrassment. "It is Count Aparanda."

"That man a Swede? Never in the world! He is a pirate of the Savannah, a sea wolf! He has just the face for a villain's part at the Ambigu."

"I agree with you, but it appears that he really belongs to a noble Swedish family."

"I have heard so, too, but now that I have seen him I cannot believe it. Between ourselves, cousin, I am greatly surprised that you should have risked your money in playing with a man with a face like that."

"I was wrong, but I have suffered for it."

"Yes, the lesson was a rough one, but why the deuce did you not cut him dead when he had the impudence to bow to you?"

"I lack presence of mind," replied Savinien, who did not wish to assign the true reason for his condescension as regards the disreputable foreigner. "In the country we are in the habit of bowing to every one who bows to us."

"You run no great risk in the country, as you know all about everybody. Here, on the contrary, we are obliged all the time to be on the defensive as regards intruders who want to force their way into society. Rudeness serves as armour. I advise you to take no further notice of this northern gentleman when he bows to you again. But tell me, hasn't he something to do with Monsieur Montauron?"

"No; not that I know of, at all events," stammered the viscount, greatly surprised.

"Nor with Madame Montauron?" insisted the marquis.

"No, nor with her."

"I ask you this, because I just now recollected that my mother, who has a remarkable memory, told me that a dozen years ago or so this so-called 'Count' Aparanda made a great figure in Paris, and paid a great deal of attention to Mademoiselle de Louvigné, who afterwards became Madame Montauron. It was even said, it seems, that he wanted to marry her."

"I—I do not know—I was not in Paris," answered Savinien, confusedly.

"And you were but a dozen years old, to be sure. I myself was too young to know what was being said in society then, but my mother was very well acquainted with an elderly lady named De Morvieux, who was a kind of distant relation of the young lady's, and she heard of a sort of adventure, the result of which was never exactly known. That reminds me now that your uncle Trémorin must know all about the matter, for Monsieur de Louvigné, the father, had been one of his friends. Ask him to tell you all about it when you see him."

"Why should I? I don't wish to mix myself up in the affairs of the Montauron household."

"Oh, only for curiosity's sake! What sort of a man is this Montauron?"

"Well, he is a very rich banker."

"It is said that he is really an honest man. But that is not what I mean. What kind of people go to his house? You went there, didn't you?"

"Yes, once. It seemed to me that there were a great many financiers. His wife, I believe, has still some friends in the society in which she formerly moved."

"Of course, I know some who will be very glad to take booths at the great charity fair which this princess of wealth is going to hold in her park. You will be there, I suppose?"

"I have not been invited yet."

"Oh, you need not have an invitation to go in and buy. It is only necessary to go in with your pockets full of money—and come out with them empty. If I hesitate in thus diverting myself it is because I have already smarted for it. For the past two years we have been absolutely assassinated with charity fairs. There cannot be the least little inundation or the smallest earthquake but what I must spend twenty-five louis at the very least. To be sure, it is very entertaining. You see duchesses selling barley sugar, and millionaires asking for alms, as it were, at the

door. If you like, we will go together to the fair which the Provincial Bank man means to give. It will be next week, I believe."

"With pleasure. The park is superb."

"Oh, I don't care for the park! But they say that it rains heiresses at this banker's house. I confess that I shouldn't be sorry to fish up some heiress or other."

"But, my dear cousin, you said just now that you would not be married on any account."

"Not a woman of my mother's choosing: that's not the same thing at all. She wants me to marry the daughter of a nobleman of Angers, as noble as a king and as solid as the Pont Neuf, who will leave fifty thousand francs yearly income to her. What in the world should I do with that? What should I live on while waiting on such hopes as those? What could I do till my father-in-law drew the last breath? Besides, my mother will not leave me more than that on her side. It is no use for me to marry a woman who has not a copper more than what I shall have myself."

"There are other reasons: the birth, the high standing of the family, and the personal qualifications of the young lady herself."

"That's all very well, my dear fellow, but it is not like money down. I am over head and ears in debt, fifteen hundred louis to that brigand of a Pinchard alone! I have no establishment to keep up, as I live at my mother's house, but she does not pay for my horses' keep, and they cost me the deuce of a lot, without counting other expenses which I cannot very well enumerate just now. Why, I want half a dozen millions along with the bride herself! If I find them I don't care how they may have been made."

"There's the Golden Pig again!" thought Viscount d'Amaulis.

"With ten millions I'll take a humpback," continued the marquis, laughing. "That surprises you, cousin, and I see that you don't approve of my conjugal 'profession of faith.' It is all very well when, like you, a man has made up his mind to live in a country château and is willing to take—nothing more easy!—some young lady belonging to our own circle, and with many good qualities and a fair dowry. In the country that is all that is necessary for happiness. Here, however, it is not the same thing at all. Under three hundred thousand francs' income means poverty, at all events to me. You will say that it is a pity to let one's-self down. I'll guarantee that in old times no one looked so closely into the matter. Marrying the daughter of a rich tax-collector was called 'manuring one's fields.' The conclusion is: if you know an heiress among the people who go to Montauron's and who wants a husband, tell me who she is."

"I know one who will bring five millions to her husband, and on her wedding day, too, for she is an orphan."

"Did her father fail?"

"I think not, but he made his fortune by risky and doubtful speculations."

"How the mischief could he have made it by honest ones? It is not by honest labour that people become millionaires. If the father has no blemish, the daughter must have one, of course."

"This girl has not. She is remarkably pretty and extremely intelligent."

"Oh! oh! oh! If she is so perfect as all that, she would suit you as well as me."

"I did not come to Paris to marry," said Savinien, evasively.

"What stuff! Just as though people ever made up their minds to

marry! People marry when they get a good chance, my friend. But now I remember, you have a cousin at Plouër, who is perhaps better intended for you than the heiress patronised by Monsieur Montauron. You turn red! Good! I've hit the mark! Everything will go smoothly, then. You shall introduce me to the five million young lady."

"Sooner than you expect, perhaps, cousin," said Savinien, who had just caught sight of a face which he had not forgotten, beyond a group of riders crossing the road.

"Not here, I presume?" said the marquis.

"I don't know whether that would be proper, but you can at least see her, as I am going to bow to her."

"Very good. Where is she?"

"There, not ten steps away, in a riding-habit in grey cloth, and a little grey hat with a black ribbon."

"That horse is a superb animal. She sits well and holds her reins beautifully; the groom, too, who is at regulation distance behind her, is quite correctly got up. Let's see her face! What eyes! what eyes! I'll take off a million on account of those eyes. You are right; she is charming!" exclaimed the Marquis de Laffemas, as he cast a knowing look at the young lady-rider, who was coming up on a thoroughbred horse. "Her figure is as handsome as her face. She has a very distinguished appearance. Bow! bow! cousin, bow as quickly as you can, and if she smiles encouragingly ride right up to her. The deuce! there's a gentleman with her!"

This was true. Mademoiselle Fourcas was escorted by a gentleman on a dappled horse. He was tall, thin, and wore a long black overcoat buttoned in military fashion to the chin, and adorned with the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour.

"I know that man," resumed Adhémar, lowering his voice; "he is a worthy fellow who was a captain before he became a riding master—captain in the French army—and now he is the most fashionable riding-professor we have; all the ladies are trying to get him to teach them. He has a special liking for me."

Savinien scarcely heard what his cousin said. He was only thinking of what was now about to take place in the crowded Allée des Poteaux, and he prepared himself to bow, without well knowing what would come of the meeting.

Mademoiselle Fourcas had not yet seen him, and her pretty face wore a look which was not habitual with her. There was a shade of weariness mingled with anxiety in her eyes, which seemed seeking some one in the throng of riders of all ages who crowded the road. A party of young American girls hid Savinien from her, but he had succeeded in perceiving her face through the waving veils of these damsels and their riding-whips carried as straight as candles.

Suddenly, however, Mademoiselle Fourcas' face lighted up. She had just caught sight of Viscount d'Amaulis. She blushed at first like a school-girl, and then turned pale like a woman in love. Savinien, as much troubled as she, did not lose his presence of mind, however, and bowed not only in time, but in such a way as to make it almost unavoidable to stop and talk a moment. The young girl, it was evident, was inclined to do so, and without stopping to reflect she swiftly turned her horse, so as to bring it near the viscount, who was on the right-hand side of the path.

She was free to suppose that he was alone, as M. de Laffemas kept back, and there was nothing to show that he was the companion of the young nobleman who played so good an accompaniment to Schübert's songs. It must be admitted that the marquis had thought of a clever manœuvre, which consisted in crossing the ride obliquely, so as to converse with the riding-master, who, as is customary, was on his pupil's right-hand side.

Conversation between Mademoiselle Fourcas and M. d'Amaulis had already begun. "At last," said she, laughing, "you have made up your mind to act like other people, and one can find you at the fashionable ride at the hour when it is considered proper to show one's-self. I come here, regularly, every day, and you know that I do, as I took pains to tell you so one evening at Madame Montauron's reception. Ah, I was very sorry that I did so, for I seemed to be making an appointment with you; and what is worse, you failed to appear, and never came at all! I am quite humiliated."

"And I was quite in despair," replied Savinien, eagerly, "for as soon as I had a horse at my disposal I came here every morning. How is it that I never have met you till now? I cannot understand it."

"If I thought that you behaved so badly intentionally I should turn round and gallop home as fast as I could. You may say that you will follow at the same pace, and I can believe that, as your chestnut is as good a horse as mine. It would be a capital race, but just now one cannot take a step without running against some other rider, and we should upset half a dozen fair ladies and as many fine gentlemen. My uncle would have enormous damages to pay, and to punish me he would forbid my riding any more."

"And I should never console myself if he did, mademoiselle, and in the meantime——"

"Will you accompany me to the Pré-Catelan road first, and afterwards on to the Porte Dauphine?"

"Wherever you wish, mademoiselle, but——"

"Oh, I shall not be compromised by it! I have a body-guard. He watches very badly over me, my body-guard. There he is talking now with a fine gentleman!"

"To whom I owe the pleasure, mademoiselle, of seeing you here, for this horse is his."

"What! are you not alone?"

"I am with the Marquis de Laffemas, my cousin, whom I have the honour of introducing to you, mademoiselle," replied Amaulis.

The marquis had kept a good look-out, and had stealthily drawn near, so as to find himself close at hand and give Savinien an opportunity of introducing him. He had, besides, turned his conversation with the riding-master to good account, for he was already in his good graces, and had learned from him that the heiress was named Fourcas, which Savinien had not yet told him. He made haste to profit by the opportunity now afforded.

"Mademoiselle," said he, with that easy politeness which is only to be acquired in good society. "I was about to ask my old friend, Captain Bricourt, to compliment you for me on your excellent style of riding—you see that you could not have avoided knowing me—but I greatly prefer being introduced to you by my relative and friend, Savinien d'Amaulis."

"Do you really think that I ride well, sir?" asked the young girl, without attempting to hide the pleasure this compliment gave her.

"The stirrup is a trifle low. I have only that fault to find."

"The marquis knows what he is talking about," said the riding teacher, "there are not ten horsemen in all Paris equal to him."

"Without counting my cousin, Monsieur d'Amaulis," added Adh  mar, gaily. "Just fancy, mademoiselle, my sending him only to-day the horse which he is now riding ! It is harder to ride than you can possibly imagine, and he is on it now for the first time. You can realise what he has done in less than two hours to bring it under control ; a lady might ride it now. I scarcely recognise my Trevelyan."

"That is skilful, indeed," remarked the ex-captain. "It several times threw the Englishman who sold it to the marquis, and yet he had a good seat."

"Trevelyan must gallop beautifully," said Mademoiselle Fourcas. "What a pity that we can only walk our horses here."

"There is nothing to prevent our finding a less frequented path," replied Savinien, eagerly.

"I should like to finish passing my review before leaving this ride. It is so entertaining to see all the different people which one finds here between ten and eleven. There comes a woman now whom I call 'the solitary one.' She looks so mournful that she makes me feel inclined to shed tears whenever I see her; indeed, it seems as though she herself were weeping over mysterious sorrows. I never saw her bow to any one. Don't you think that it would be amusing to find out the meaning of this living enigma? But look at that fat couple riding in view of reducing their flesh ! The husband and wife together must weigh over five hundred pounds. They absolutely bow their poor horses down. Every time I see them I feel inclined to report them to some society for the prevention of cruelty to animals."

"A good idea ! If some of the ridiculous objects one meets could be kept out of the Bois, my heart would be gladdened. But, as a whole, the appearance of the riders is very attractive. Don't you agree with me, mademoiselle ? And don't you think that there are better riders in Paris than anywhere else ?"

"I have never ridden anywhere but here, so that I cannot say. It seems to me, however, that in Brittany——"

"People learn to keep their seat, but holding on is not everything," said M. de Laffemas.

"Defend yourself, Monsieur d'Amaulis !" exclaimed the young girl, gaily. "The conqueror of Trevelyan has a right to be heard."

"Mademoiselle," replied Savinien, "I make no pretensions as a rider, except that I don't fear either hard-mouthed horses or bad roads. We hunt down there in woods where most Parisians would come to grief."

"Oh, following hounds ! that is my dream of bliss !" exclaimed Mademoiselle Fourcas.

"A pleasure which you can easily have, mademoiselle," said the marquis, eagerly. "One of my friends, who lives twenty leagues from Paris, has one of the finest forests in France. When the season begins, his wife would, I am sure, be delighted to receive you at her ch  teau at Chadeuil."

As soon as the conversation had started, the two cousins, without saying anything to each other, had hastily turned their horses round, and

ridden on side by side with Mademoiselle Fourcas, in order to converse with her at ease. The Viscount d'Amaulis was on her left, the Marquis de Laffemas on her right, and beside him Captain Bricourt, who felt no desire to act the censor. It was easy to see that with him Mademoiselle Fourcas found herself at liberty to do as she pleased.

"Yes, mademoiselle," resumed the gallant Adhémar, "it depends upon you alone to attend a hunt this year like few that can now be had in our country—a truly royal hunt. The Duke d'Aumale hasn't a finer pack of hounds at Chantilly, nor better horses than my old friend Chadeuil."

"I daresay, sir," said Madame Montauron's favourite; "but this princely amusement is not for me. Why should I be invited by Madame de Chadeuil, whom I have not the honour of knowing, and who probably is not aware of my existence?"

"You are mistaken, mademoiselle," replied the marquis, audaciously. "The fame of your beauty and wit has spread everywhere, and every door which you might deign to knock at would be opened to you."

"Heaven knows that I would *deign* very willingly, but I cannot 'knock' all alone. Please remember that I am an orphan, and do not go anywhere excepting to see Madame Montauron."

"She ought to be able to introduce you into the best society, as she belongs to it by birth."

"But she does not go out. She lives a very retired life."

"Not so very retired, as she is soon going to give a great charity-fair in her park, to which she intends to invite all Paris."

"Oh, once is not always!"

"But you will be at the fair, will you not, mademoiselle?"

"Yes. It seems I am to play a part in the affair. I am to sell something—matches, cigarettes, or flowers."

"My cousin and I will buy up all you have for sale, and if you will allow me on that occasion to profit by the opportunity to make you acquainted with the Countess de Chadeuil, I shall feel most happy indeed."

"I should be highly flattered; but if—which is not likely—she should do me the honour to invite me to her château, I should be obliged to decline, unless she invited my governess and my uncle also. Between ourselves, I would willingly go by myself, but it would not be thought proper. Proper! that is the great word—the watchword of slavery!"

"Why should not your uncle be invited?"

"I cannot very well fancy him hunting a stag," replied Mademoiselle Fourcas, laughing. "He is an excellent man, but he never rode on horseback in his life, and I shouldn't care for him to be killed."

"He could stay at the château while the hunt went on, and he would find some one to talk to, for Chadeuil has very sedentary guests, and financiers, too."

"I am afraid that they would hardly care to talk about the Bourse with him all day long. Nor do I think that I should find any great pleasure in galloping pompously along well-kept roads. I should think that I was at the court of Louis Quatorze. Your fashionable amusements are too solemn for me, as my tastes are those of a barbarian. Men in red coats and women in court riding-habits would terrify me. I should be thinking of the wild Brittany forests which Monsieur d'Amaulis was telling us about just now—those in which Parisians would be so apt to break their necks."

The marquis bit his lip and Savinien raised his head. He had been

so far a silent listener to the conversation, in which he thought that his cousin took too conspicuous a part. He felt that very natural annoyance arising from rivalry which may exist without there being any love in the matter. It was not jealousy, but simply displeasure. A man is always inclined to think more of a woman whom some one else admires, although he may not until then have given her a thought.

Now, Savinien had thought more than once of Mademoiselle Fourcas since their first meeting, and was delighted to have met her, but he was still hesitating as to how far he would allow himself to become interested in her, when the Marquis de Laffemas began to goad him on, as it were, by paying her the most undisguised attentions. Adh  mar had no hesitation in throwing himself eagerly into a fray the prize of which would be five millions, and began by using heroic measures. He proposed to introduce M. Fourcas into the most aristocratic and exclusive society. In this he was very daring, as the Countess de Chadeuil was not to be trifled with as to her guests. He counted, in point of fact, upon the friendship of her husband, who would understand the situation, and help him on to win the heiress. Between men of the world such services are exchanged. However, Adh  mar already saw that he had an intelligent girl before him, and realised that Mademoiselle Fourcas did not easily swallow any bait set for her vanity. This parvenu's daughter had plenty of common sense and a strong will. She knew how to defend herself, and in order to get rid of the premature overtures of the marquis, she now appealed to Savinien d'Amaulis, who did not require urging to come forward.

"My fellow Bretons would be much flattered, mademoiselle, if they knew your preference for our poor province. But if you saw it your illusions would soon vanish."

"Do you say that so as to avoid asking me to hunt in your woods?" said the young girl, with a somewhat sarcastic smile. "You must know that my uncle would not go out of his way to hunt at Plou  r any more than he would to visit the Ch  teau de Chadeuil. You saw him the other evening at Madame Montauron's reception. You must know what to think of him. He does not like music, books, the fine arts, nature, or active exercise."

"He likes business only," remarked M. de Laffemas, "and I do not blame him. In these degenerate days business is everything."

"Then I do not belong to the times, for I hate business. But don't think that I mean to complain of my good uncle or that I take him as a tyrant. He leaves me perfectly free and does not undertake to change my tastes. Ask Monsieur Bricourt."

"I can certify," replied the riding-master, greatly flattered at being called upon as a witness, "Monsieur Fourcas, who detests horses, allows Mademoiselle Julia to keep four, and those we are riding to-day are not the best of them."

"Yes, gentlemen, I keep horses," said the heiress, laughing. "My uncle never goes into my stables, but he lets me visit them oftener than is quite proper for a young person. He knows that I like to do so, and that is enough for him."

"Mademoiselle," said the marquis, in a jocular tone, "you cannot marry anybody but a member of the Jockey Club."

"I shall take good care not to do so. He would try to inculcate his own precepts as to horseflesh and horsemanship, and I have my own ideas and hold on to them."

"You would soon convert him," urged M. de Laffemas, nettled by the retort.

"No, I should not try. Besides, as I am making confessions, I may as well say that I don't care to have a master. I am too fond of living as I do since the best of uncles took me home from the convent where I spent five years, which were not the most agreeable of my existence by any means. I have my own residence, so to speak, in the house in which we live in the Avenue du Trocadéro; the entire left wing is given up to me, and I do as I please there. It is true that I don't abuse my freedom, for I have no one with me but my staid governess, Miss Georgina Pearson, but if I chose to give any balls there my uncle would not, I believe, prevent me. But see what a strange-looking man is coming towards us?" exclaimed Mademoiselle Fourcas, suddenly, pointing to a rider who was rapidly approaching them, accompanied by a woman as fair as he was dark.

Savinien frowned. He had recognised Count Aparanda and the giddy woman who answered to the soft name of Anita, and at this moment the meeting was doubly annoying. The idea of receiving, in presence of Mademoiselle Fourcas, another salutation from the Swede, and another smile from the damsel, vexed Viscount d'Amaulis beyond measure. Unfortunately, there was no possibility of avoiding this unpleasant meeting. The road was narrow, and unless they turned back it would be necessary to pass the objectionable pair.

"It must be Blue-Beard," said the young girl to Savinien.

"With his eighth wife," added the marquis.

Savinien, who had no disposition to smile, put on an air of haughty indifference, and so managed his horse as to place himself at the critical moment between Anita and Mademoiselle Fourcas, whom he wished to preserve from all contact with the actress.

He turned Trevelyan to the right, and the three other horses which were in a line with his had to turn as he did. This prudent manœuvre had the effect of leaving a free passage for the advancing couple, and all that Count Aparanda had to do, to continue straight on, was not to notice the riders whose path he had to cross. Everything should have induced him to do so. It is not customary to bow more than once to the same person during the same ride, nor is it customary when a man goes so far as to show himself in public with an actress of questionable notoriety, for him to bow to such persons as he may happen to be acquainted with. Men do not recognise each other in Paris under such circumstances.

Count Aparanda had, however, special motives for departing from these rules. Anita, no doubt obeying his directions, rode forward at this decisive moment, and so turned her horse as to brush against Viscount d'Amaulis.

"When shall you come to take your revenge at cards?" said she, speaking very loudly. "We expect you every evening, my dear sir. Make haste and come!" And with this she smiled at the viscount in the most familiar manner.

Savinien, scarlet with anger, felt at the moment as though he could have strangled her. He took care not to look at Mademoiselle Fourcas, but without turning his head towards her, he thought he could discern a scornful and sarcastic expression on her charming face. He fancied, also, that his cousin Adhémar sneered, and he asked himself what he should do to destroy the effect of Anita's stupid impertinence.

The Swede, who was riding directly behind the damsel, bowed to him gravely, and was so near to him that the salutation was an absolute attack. It was necessary to return this bow, meant as a provocation, or to cut the man dead on the spot.

Savinien, exasperated by this misplaced insistence, preferred to cut him. He put on a face such as might have frozen the Seine in midsummer, and in his anger spurred Trevelyan, who was not an animal of meek disposition. The horse, suddenly goaded, bounded forward, bringing its rider to the left, and the viscount fearing to run against Mademoiselle Fourcas, brushed against Count Aparanda's horse in endeavouring to avoid that of the heiress. It was the affair of a moment, and the squadron around the young lady was then free to go on.

"What, sir!" she exclaimed, laughing, "do you know Blue-Beard and his eighth spouse? She might pass, for she is pretty and looks lively, and must be a very entertaining hostess, but the gentleman who follows her like her shadow is very repulsive, and I am surprised that he should be one of your friends."

"He! I met him at a club, where I shall never set foot again; heaven forbid that I should cultivate his acquaintance!"

He had scarcely spoken, when a hand was laid upon his arm, and a voice, of which he well knew the sound, spoke these brief and significant words: "Two words with you, if you please."

The viscount immediately stopped his horse, and found himself face to face with Count Aparanda, who had ridden back to take him to task.

"What do you want?" he demanded, drily.

"I wish to know why you did not return my bow."

"Because it did not suit me to do so. I ought to ask you why you presume to bow to me when you are with a woman so bold as that?"

"A woman who received you at her house, and is quite as good as some who go about in society."

"Sir!"

"No big words, if you please! You have grossly insulted me, and you ran against my horse. You shall give me satisfaction for your insolence!"

"Whenever you please. I shall expect your seconds," replied Savinien d'Amaulis, urging on Trevelyan, who with one bound caught up with Mademoiselle Fourcas's chestnut. Count Aparanda turned his own horse, and rejoined Anita, who had not lost a word, and felt wild with joy. No one had ever yet fought on her account. A duel would make her yet more fashionable—especially one between titled men—and she certainly would not speak a word to prevent its taking place, even had she been sure that her escort would be shot in the encounter.

The feelings of Mademoiselle Fourcas were very different from these; they were to be detected in her anxious eyes. "What did that gentleman say to you?" asked she, in a husky tone.

"Nothing that would interest you, mademoiselle," replied Savinien d'Amaulis, endeavouring to speak with unconcern. "He wished to obtain certain information, and he thought it allowable to accost me here. Some foreigners are very ill bred."

The young girl said no more, but Savinien clearly saw that she was not deceived by his reply. From that moment she remained silent, and all the agreeable talk of M. de Laffemas failed to induce her to speak a word.

The marquis was soon reduced to chatting to the riding-master, who could talk of nothing but his business; and as Savinien was taciturn, the ride became very far from sociable. Mademoiselle Fourcas cut it short when she reached Pré-Catelan.

"We must part, gentlemen," said she, affecting a gaiety which she was far from feeling. "My uncle expects me at breakfast. I have only just time to go home and dress."

"We are going to return home also," said M. de Laffemas, eagerly. "You will not, I hope, refuse us the pleasure of escorting you to your door?"

"No, no! My uncle would not like to see me with so many gentlemen, and people in the Avenue du Trocadéro would make remarks about it. Monsieur Bricourt will suffice as an escort, and we shall go by the Porte de la Muette. That is the shortest route."

"May I hope, mademoiselle, that you will allow our worthy Bricourt to show me your horses?"

"Oh, with pleasure! If you or Monsieur d'Amaulis would like to ride them, I shall be delighted. Good morning, gentlemen," added Mademoiselle Fourcas, who then abruptly turned to the left and set out along the road to the lake. The riding-master and the groom followed, and the cousins remained alone.

"That young lady is far from being common-place, and the man whom she may prefer will be a fortunate fellow," said the Marquis de Laffemas. "I wish that it were I; but I think, my dear Savinien, that you are the man."

"I hope not, as I have no thoughts of her," replied Savinien.

"Are you sincere in what you say, cousin?"

"Entirely so."

"Then you would not object to my paying attention to Mademoiselle Fourcas?"

"Not in the least."

"I consider that settled, then, and shall act accordingly. Shall we go back to the Rue de Varennes?"

"If you like; but I must ask you to excuse me from taking breakfast with you. I have business at home."

"Very well. You are free, my dear friend. But tell me what you said to the bearded individual."

"He asked me why I did not bow to him. I replied that I did not bow to people whom I did not fancy."

"You were quite right: what then? He challenged you, I presume?"

"Yes, and I am expecting his seconds."

"The mischief! That is a pity. There is no honour in fighting with that man."

"I could not avoid all this, however. I rely on you to stand by me."

"On the duelling-ground? That is a most unpleasant task, dear cousin."

"You refuse?"

"No, not exactly. I am too fond of you to leave you in the lurch, but I warn you that we shall have a great deal of trouble in finding seconds among my friends at the club, and that I shall not consent to go out with any man who does not move in my own circle. I should prefer that the matter should be arranged. It is quite likely that this adventurer may change his mind. Wait for his seconds, and if they appear send them to

me. I will find out what it all amounts to, and act for you as I would for myself. At present, however, let us go home. We have passed all the carriages and can ride faster."

Savinien did not need any urging, and so giving Trevelyan the rein he set off with his cousin at a rapid trot towards home.

IV.

THE great day had come; the superb mansion in the Avenue Ruysdael had thrown its doors open to all such generous people as might be disposed to contribute to the charitable foundation initiated and patronised by Madame Montauron.

It was a question of erecting an asylum where destitute young girls would find a shelter and be protected from vicious associations, as well as learn a calling. It was also proposed to give the more deserving of them a dowry when they had reached a marriageable age. A noble and difficult enterprise, indeed, unless backed up by a very large amount of capital.

The director of the Provincial Bank had, on his side, already supplied a large sum, and it was hoped that the public would do the rest. It is well-known that society promptly responds to such appeals. To obtain all, and even more than is needed in such a case, it is only necessary to prepare some attractive entertainment, such as one of these fairs, at which feminine beauty can be gratified, while fashionable men can while away their time and spend a heap of money in an agreeable manner.

Madame Montauron had every facility for organising a productive sale, for she had both influence and wealth at her disposal. The attractiveness of the ladies charged with the stalls was an all important matter. Booths in which only quiet citizens' wives or daughters sat would not answer the purpose. Birth, and, above all, beauty was necessary in the saleswomen. However, the banker's wife had only to enlarge the circle of her usual acquaintance a little to find as many saleswomen as she needed. As her house was one which it was desirable to visit, the stalls were in great demand, so great, indeed, that it seemed as though some ladies would actually make bids for them.

The site selected for the fair was a delightful one. The park was as handsome as the Terrasse des Feuillants in the Tuileries Garden, and as well adapted for the reception of a crowd of fashionable people. The conservatory, the paths, the lawns, the leafy dome formed by the trees, all furnished varied and picturesque effects of light and shade. The newspapers spoke of the surprises which would await the people who responded to the charitable appeal made to the public by the medium of the press; for M. Montauron called upon the whole public, and his grounds were to be thrown open to all comers.

This resolution had certainly not been arrived at without hesitation or discussion. The original plan had been to limit the admissions to persons known either to the banker or to his wife. Indeed, Madame Montauron was greatly in favour of this course, and she suggested issuing invitations to the people whose patronage they desired.

Her husband, however, held a different opinion on the matter. He very reasonably maintained that in the interest of those whom the fair was intended to benefit, the park ought to be thrown open to all comers. It seemed to him that the system of offering State loans to public sub-

scription was worthy of imitation. The public at large would spend more money than a few chosen individuals, however wealthy the latter might be ; and in regard to the result which it was sought to attain, it was not worth while haggling over the means. Why should the charity proffered by people without any social standing be refused, simply because they did not belong to the world of fashion, or because they might wish to try and appear to belong to that circle by taking part in the charitable schemes of others more socially favoured ? What was to be feared ?

Certainly these pleasures are costly, and people of low breeding would no doubt think they were paying expensively for an opportunity of displaying their bad manners, were they called upon to disburse three or four twenty franc pieces ! Such people are ill at ease in a circle to which they are unaccustomed and often behave badly ; still, if they fail to conduct themselves with propriety, it is easy to expel them, as the majority is never in their favour.

As regards women, it was decided that none should be admitted unaccompanied by gentlemen. It was thought that this would prevent the presence of any undesirable characters, as a man of good standing would think twice before making his appearance with an objectionable person leaning upon his arm.

Thus it was, that at about four o'clock one afternoon early in June, a crowd of elegantly-dressed men and women gathered together in the park of the great banker, Montauron. The weather was favourable, for although a few clouds tempered the heat of the sun there were no signs of approaching rain.

Dresses of all kinds were to be seen at this open-air gathering, for sales of this kind allow women an opportunity of appearing in costumes which are too conspicuous to be displayed elsewhere by daylight. The scene was thus almost like a masked ball, and the innovation was a happy one, for nothing could be more charming than these revivals of the most tasteful bygone fashions. Here on one side you saw a Polignac habit in mauve-tinted watered silk, here a Leezinska mantle in red Utrecht velvet embroidered with gold, here a robe of white lace, and a habit of violet satin, ruffles of English point, and large duchess hats, reminding one of the royal promenades at Versailles and Trianon. There were lilac dresses shot with pink, reminding one of those depicted in the paintings of Madame Vigée Lebrun ; and here on another side one of lilac tinted with rose and richly embroidered, reminded one of the days of the Consulate. The lady who wore it recalled the portraits of the Empress Josephine at Malmaison. Then came costumes suited to whatever the wearer sold. There were cigar-dealers in Havana-coloured dresses, milkmaids in short skirts with many stripes, offering milk in cups of Sèvres china ; cake-sellers, with straw hats caught up with bows on one side, and decked with roses of a deep red ; sellers of Chinese goods with little hats, imitating those of the Celestials, and flowery robes of white silk lined with red satin ; bouquet-vendors simply attired in white muslin ; while ladies with bags for collecting alms were dressed in black with trimmings of glistening jet.

Beside the path along which M. Montauron had strolled with Savinien most of the sights were gathered. There was a long gallery, with stalls along its entire length, stalls draped with velvet and gold fringe, the effect of which was very artistic. On the right, on the lawn, was a dairy ; a pretty tent, near which, to give some "local colour," two beautiful dappled cows from Brittany were penned. At the entrance of the conservatory, amid

the plants and flowers, there was a large bazaar, hung with pale yellow silk embroidered with figures of strange-looking animals, and provided with seats and props of bamboo in its natural state. And beneath the shade of the old trees, in the depths of shady groves, gilded kiosks filled with Japanese oddities shone out like luminous points; while here and there were tents for playing Dutch top, and revolving merry-go-rounds. Venetian lanterns of many colours hung in garlands across the walks, ready for illumination at night, for the fair was to be prolonged through the evening. Some of the amusements, indeed, would not begin until sunset, and some of the visitors had certainly waited for this, the second portion of the programme, so that an increase of the crowd might be looked for at that time.

Savinien had at first intended waiting until nine o'clock in the evening to make his appearance, as his heart was far from light, and if he presented himself at all it was rather in view of fulfilling a duty than in the hope of being amused. But he remembered that he would have more difficulty in finding Madame Montauron at night-time, and that it would be better to look for her while it was day-light in order that she might tell him whether she could find an opportunity of speaking to him.

For some days past the viscount had lived in a state of suspense which was fast becoming exasperation. An encounter with Count Aparanda had appeared to him inevitable, and he had for some days awaited that individual's seconds, reflecting in the meanwhile that his own possible death would leave Madame Montauron without a protector against the Swede. On the other hand, if the Swede fell in the encounter, he would carry into the other world the secret of her daughter's whereabouts.

However, on the morning of the fourth day after the challenge given in the Bois—Savinien had in the meantime thought it necessary to remain at home waiting for the arrival of the cardsharp's seconds—the following note reached him :

"SIR,—As long as you represent the interests of a certain person, who shall be nameless, we cannot fight. It is above everything essential that my position as regards that lady should be defined, and in order that this should be accomplished, I have already appointed a limit of time, which will not expire till the fifteenth of June. Until then I must not fight. When you insulted me, I could not control my first impulse of anger, and I told you to expect my seconds on the morrow. I have reflected, however, and shall not send any one to you. But, for all that, I intend when the right time comes, to exact from you the satisfaction which you owe me. I do not mean to leave France without having given you the lesson you deserve."

This singular epistle freed Viscount d'Amaulis for the moment from his anxiety as regarded Madame Montauron, but he did not reply to it, and kept it to himself. He could not show it to his cousin Adh  mar, who would not have understood its true meaning, and who would have in all probability asked the name of the lady to whom it alluded. So Savinien limited himself to informing the marquis that Aparanda's seconds had not made their appearance, and that he thought there would be nothing more heard of the duel.

Nor did he say anything to Brigitte as regarded the challenge. Why frighten the nurse and mistress who already passed their lives in perpetual anguish and suspense? The nurse, whom he questioned, had nothing further to tell him, as the detective who watched Count Aparanda had

discovered nothing. For the time, too, apparent peace reigned in the abode of M. Montauron. Certain symptoms, however, led the banker's wife to fear that this tranquillity would be but transient, and through Brigitte, she entreated Savinien not to abandon his task, and especially, not to fail to appear at the charity fair, where she might be able to speak freely with him.

There had been no news of Mademoiselle Julia Fourcas since the ride in the Allée des Poteaux. Savinien having waited for Aparanda's seconds was unable to resume his rides till the count's letter reached him; and when he then returned to the Bois de Boulogne, he saw nothing of the heiress. However he met Adhémair de Laffemas, who did not allude to her, and this silence seemed strange to the viscount, who at once suspected his cousin of secret endeavours to make the conquest of the young girl, or rather of her millions.

As an additional annoyance, letters had ceased to come from Plouër. No more lengthy missives from uncle Trémorin; no more postscripts, consequently, from cousin Yvonne. Three days sometimes elapsed without any news from any source whatever, and courage failed the viscount to write under the pressure of existing circumstances. Thus it was that he found himself entering the Avenue Ruysdaël charity fair in no smiling mood.

It was at its height, and presented an absolutely dazzling aspect. Savinien's first meeting was with a dealer in programmes, a lady dressed in lilac satin, with flounces of Spanish lace, which superb dame deigned to accept one louis—her flounces must have cost one hundred—in exchange for a little bit of card-board on which a few gilt letters were printed.

Further on, an "almoner," in a dress of maroon satin, extended a red velvet purse to him with such grace that he could not do less than drop forty francs in it "for the poor." He had no sooner received in exchange a charming smile and a "Thank you, sir!" than he saw a group of young girls who immediately surrounded him, proposing to sell him lottery tickets. These charming creatures were fair and rosy; they wore Directoire costumes and "Clarissa Harlowe" hats, and seemed as though they had never done anything in their lives but gather in a garland, as it were, round about the first-comer to entreat him to remember the poor. The most active of them slipped a ticket into the viscount's hand, saying: "It is a hundred francs, sir."

Savinien overwhelmed, so to speak, gave a bank-note and went his way, asking himself what would become of him when his purse was emptied, which would not take long at the rate at which he was already draining it. Suddenly, however, kind fate sent him George Fougeray, who approached from a walk near by.

"Here you are at last!" exclaimed the young speculator, whom Amaulis had seen but little of late. "I knew very well that I should find you here, and I came for that very purpose. Ah! you may flatter yourself that you are a pretty tricky fellow! Ever since we were deprived of our coin at Anita's you have not been either to the club or to see me. Is it because you want to get into the Jockey that you scorn your former friends? Before you turn your backs upon them, wait till that illustrious club receives you into its arms."

"That is not the reason," muttered Savinien, reddening slightly. "I have been engaged with my relatives in the Faubourg Saint-Germain."

"Oh, I don't ask you to account for yourself to me. You are quite free

to pass your mornings galloping about the Allée des Poteaux, and your evenings who knows where?"

"Who told you that I was in the habit of riding? It is true, however, that I am. I always rode in Brittany, and now my cousin Laffemas has placed his horses at my disposal."

"I thought so. Anita told me she met you riding a half-breed that was worth, at least, three hundred louis. Such horses as that cannot be had for hire. But may I ask you what is the matter between you and Aparanda?"

"Nothing. Thank Heaven, I never see him!"

"It seems that you had some words with him in the Bois de Boulogne the other day—pretty sharp words, too."

"There was something of the sort about a bow which I did not return. But nothing came of it, I am almost sorry to say, for I don't like the man at all."

"Neither do I. I have never forgiven him for robbing me of my last penny. I am only glad that I did not try to recoup myself with another game, for he still continues to play, and is lucky with scandalous persistency. He is now ruining Glébof."

"Then he has no idea of leaving Paris?"

"In full tide of luck?—no fear! He won't leave till he cannot find any one left to play with him."

"That may be the case at no very late day."

"Let him go! Nobody will try to keep him."

"Flowers, gentlemen!" now said a charming woman in white faille.

"Embroidered fans, gentlemen!" said a deliciously pretty creature, with a big white straw hat with a gauze veil as trimming.

"Very sorry, ladies," said George, showing a dozen lottery-tickets, a programme, and two flutes. "I have so much in my hands now that I can't possibly buy any more."

"But you, sir—you have not bought anything," exclaimed both ladies at once, turning to Savinien, who was obliged to buy both a fan and a bouquet which cost him two louis, George, meantime, laughing in his sleeve.

"How much up to the present time?" asked he as he dragged Savinien away.

"Ten louis, and they persist in saying that I have not bought anything! I already have a programme and a hundred lottery-tickets."

"Where are they?"

"In my pocket."

"You great goose! If you had done as I do you would have got off this time. I exhibit my purchases, and people let me alone. I expect to get through the business for five louis. That isn't dear for the pleasure of seeing the fair in your company, for I warn you that I shan't leave you unless I am in your way?"

Savinien made a gesture of denial which was not sincere, but with which George was satisfied.

"Well, that is too much!" suddenly exclaimed the young speculator. "There's Pinchard! Does he expect to lend money to the managers of the fair?"

"Pinchard!" exclaimed Savinien; "Pinchard, the twenty-five-per-cent man! How is it that people receive such fellows as that?"

"My dear boy," said George, placidly, "everybody is received here,

for the excellent reason that everybody pays to get in. 'Come in who pleases' is the rule at charity sales. Besides, Pinchard's presence is not to be sneered at. That money-lender there has a deal of hard cash, and as he is very sharp he won't hesitate about spending a large sum to advertise himself. Besides, he knows all Paris, and will easily find some one to countenance him."

"It is because all Paris knows him that he ought not to mix with the people he robs," said Savinien, indignantly.

"You don't understand anything about it," retorted George. "This garden is full of people who will be delighted to see him. They will positively take advantage of it to try to borrow money from him."

"Suppose we take advantage of it to talk about our loan?"

"What in the world do you want to say to him about it? It will be time enough to talk about it when the cash falls due."

"It is that date that annoys me when I think of it."

"Have you forgotten that we have three months before us, and that I am sure of being ready by the fifteenth of September?"

"No, but I am always afraid of some unforeseen impediment, and if that man would only repeat the assurance which he gave us to renew the note it would afford me extreme satisfaction."

"I shall take good care not to ask him. It would amount to the same thing as telling him that he would inconvenience us to the last degree by exacting his money on the fifteenth of June. My principle is to let a sleeping lion alone, or a sleeping creditor, which is just the same thing. Let him speak to us, my dear friend; he will speak soon enough."

"This time I believe you are right, for he has spied us out, and is coming our way."

"This would be the time, then, to go to the stalls, even if it cost us ten louis more, each of us?"

"No! no! We should look as though we were running away from him. Besides, it is too late. Here he is now."

The interesting Pinchard was indeed advancing, his hat on one side, a rose in his button-hole, and some parcels under his arm. He smiled affably upon the two friends and made ready to accost them. George Fougeray would have been glad to have avoided him, but he put a good face upon the matter and exclaimed: "You too! you coming to a charity fair! The world must be upside down, upon my word of honour!"

"You are still as polite as ever, I see," replied the money-lender in an almost surly tone. "Why should I be forbidden to bring my mite to the orphans?"

"You have a perfect right to do so, Pinchard. Charity is within the reach of every French citizen, like universal suffrage. You can do a charitable act on a grand scale. You have only to give all your clients all their notes back."

"The deuce! that would cost me too much, and my debtors are not poor."

"They will be if they keep on borrowing from you," sneered George.

"I don't ask them to do so," replied Pinchard in a dry tone, "especially just now as I need all the money which I have lent."

"What do you say?"

"The truth. I have just been robbed of a hundred thousand francs by a Spaniard who has gone off without paying me."

"That serves you right for lending money to a Spaniard."

"My dear sir, I lend to whoever borrows. This man has large plantations in Havana, and will pay me some day or other. But just now I am pinched."

"You look so! Come now, you would lend me two thousand louis more if I asked you."

"Not two thousand francs."

"Not even on my friend Amaulis' signature?"

"It is good, no doubt; but as I could not cash it at the Bank of France I could not do anything with it just now. After the fifteenth it will be another matter."

"What do you mean by 'after the fifteenth?'"

"I have a good deal of money to receive that day, and when my cash-box is full I shan't refuse to lend on whatever offers."

"Glad to hear it; but, my dear friend, you don't count upon us to increase your funds at that date?"

"I beg your pardon, I most certainly do. Forty-three thousand francs is a sum which I cannot suffer to lie idle."

"You forget that you promised to renew the bill for three months."

"I know that, but no one is expected to do what is impossible."

"Come now, Pinchard, be reasonable. Just remember that you gave us your word of honour to renew our note till the fifteenth of September, that we treated only on that condition, and that the interest was set at a high figure on that account."

"I did not foresee what has occurred. I am now reduced to turning everything into money at once. I am sorry to put you to trouble, but necessity has no law. Besides, the need I experience is only for the time being, and when I have made all my payments I shall be more than ever at your orders, and especially at those of Viscount d'Amaulis."

Savinien replied not a word to this remark. He was in consternation.

"Very well," rejoined George, angrily. "It suits you to act in a wrong manner towards me personally. You shall repent of it, I take my oath."

"You personally," not at all. I am obliged to act in the same manner towards all who are indebted to me. Even my being here is because I expected to see them almost all. Instead of writing to them I have told them by word of mouth that they must pay down upon the fifteenth of the month, and I must say that they have taken it very quietly, all those I have seen as yet, at any rate."

"Well, then, they are more amiable than I am, for I declare that I will pay you for this trick! I know almost all the fools who enable you to carry on your paltry trade, and I will tell them that you act in bad faith and that your word is not to be relied upon."

"I hope to have the opportunity of proving the contrary," replied the usurer, without apparent anger, "and I am not uneasy as to what you owe me."

"Oh, you shall be paid! But it will cost you dearer than you think!"

"We shall see. Allow me to add that in three months or even a month you won't be sorry, perhaps, to find me."

With this sarcastic farewell Pinchard turned away and disappeared in the crowd which thronged about the entrance of the garden. His rounds had doubtless been made, and he had no more debtors to warn. The short chat had taken place at a distance from the ladies who were accosting the new arrivals, and the two friends remained face to face, equally disconcerted,

"What do you think of that good-for-nothing scoundrel?" asked George.

"Nothing. I expected something of the sort," replied Savinien, sadly.

"But what are we to do?"

"Pay him, the devil take him! If we don't he will sue us unmercifully."

"You will be obliged to sell your Ottoman stock, then?"

"Yes, if I can't do otherwise, for this affair would ruin me. My Ottoman stock is my last shot."

"What! have you come to that?"

"For three weeks past or so ill-luck has dogged my footsteps on 'Change as well as at cards. My settling-up was something dreadful."

"How is that when you have such reliable information to work upon?"

"I have none at present. Rheinthal has gone to Tunis to act in his patron's interests. Besides, everything has turned against me. It makes me believe that that Swede has the evil eye. To finish me off I need only fail to pay Pinchard."

"I beg you to believe that if I could help you——"

"But you cannot," interrupted George. "Tell me, Savinien, do you really think that if you wrote to your uncle he would leave you in the hands of this money-lender?"

"I don't know what he would do; but I haven't the courage to write to him about the matter."

"But if I find I cannot pay, Pinchard will come to you, and you would be obliged to pay in my place. I hope that no such thing will happen. I would rather sell my last pair of shoes. But suppose I should die before the note falls due, what then?"

"In such a case I would rather mortgage or sell my land than confess my folly to my uncle."

"It would come to the same thing, for I defy you to conceal from him what you might do in that way. The whole district round about the château would know of it."

"That is true. I should be pointed at as a madman who is spending his fortune, and you little think what I should lose by that."

"I know what you would lose, for in the country people can't marry if they sell or mortgage their land. That is why, in case of trouble, it would be better to apply to Monsieur de Trémorin; but I will take my measures to avert the calamity. I have not a moment to lose, for the fifteenth is near at hand, and as I have no heart for the amusements of this fair, I am going to return home. I have spent five louis, but I do not regret them, for if I had not come here I should have had no inkling of Pinchard's evil intentions—the rascal! Good day: I will see you soon. I must see you to tell you where we stand."

"Try to arrange matters," said Savinien, without attempting to detain the imprudent friend who had placed him in this distressing position.

George's promises did not inspire him with much hope. He had stated, and with perfect truth, that his last ventures on 'Change had been bad, and the attempt which he had made to induce the viscount to apply to his uncle proved that he was by no means sure of being able to take up the note.

Savinien now began to realise the full extent of the disastrous consequences of an act so foolish in itself that it would scarcely have been pardonable in a schoolboy. To lend money to a friend who is embarrassed

is quite right and proper, but to give that friend the use of your name is an act of folly. Savinien knew this, and yet he had allowed himself to be led into committing himself in this manner. He could now do nothing but pay, and he was conscious that it would cost him his peace and his happiness, the friendship of M. de Trémorin and the affection of Yvonne. He already foresaw the fatal end. He walked on, lost in sad thoughts, threading the merry crowd from which he would gladly have fled, for had he been able to do as he pleased he would have gone off like George Fougeray.

"The sooner that I see Madame Montauron the better," said he to himself. "If she makes me a sign to say that she does not need me to-day, I shall be free to go off."

And, in order to find out what he wished to know, he dashed into the midst of the throng, foreseeing that he would be obliged to search all the stalls to find the lady he wanted.

Proceeding through the park, so full of fresh surprises at every turn, he espied a long line of gilded stalls extending past the conservatory. From a spot where he momentarily paused he could take in the whole line at a single glance, and he saw no familiar face. The saleswomen were charming, and their toilets were wonderfully beautiful. Models for all the portrait painters of Paris were to be seen, with many a picturesque bit likely to tempt the draughtsmen of the illustrated newspapers; indeed, besides several reporters taking notes, there were artists making rough sketches. However, Viscount d'Amaulis had not come to admire pretty faces, or to examine the different styles of Gainsborough, Reynolds, and Amy Robsart hats, or to compare toilets newly devised by great dress-makers—masculine ones—in faille or satin. Chinese crape of dazzling colour, or marvellous surah silk. He would most willingly have given all the splendour to have caught sight of his cousin Yvonne in a linen dress, with a straw hat on her head, at the end of the park.

But this was only one view of the fair. The bulk of the sales proceeded under the far-spreading trees whence there came a clashing of cymbals and a rolling of big drums, as on the Place du Trône when the great gingerbread fair is taking place. Savinien thought that the most stylish of the saleswomen would probably be found in the most crowded groves.

He entered one of these and came, at first, in full view of a huge vehicle for the display of gymnastic feats, with a gallery round it and a platform on which an orchestra was perched. This was completely surrounded by an admiring crowd. There were four musicians in red blowing away at their brass instruments, and in front was M. Bouret in a conspicuous costume, gesticulating, as if he were possessed, shouting as loud as he could yell, and all this to sell some pencils to the passers-by.

Savinien could not control his astonishment at the sight of a banker's right-hand man in such a costume, and, forgetting his sorrow, he stopped for a moment to contemplate this scene, and to listen to what the under-manager was saying. "They are worth four sous, and I am selling them for *only* five francs a-piece!" he shouted. "See, gentlemen, my pencils are gilded; they are indestructible; they are worth all the steel pens and goose-quills in the world; they are sharpened at both ends; they can be used to write love-letters, and to sign cheques. Do your hear, viscount?" added Bouret, catching sight of Savinien, "you can write declarations of love, or I O U's of fifty louis each to play at baccarat. Four, did you say, my noble lord? Here they are."

Savinien, stunned and bewildered, handed over a louis and fled, cursing the facetious financier who thus publicly called upon him in imitation of Mangin the quack, and who wore a dress very similar to that of the departed Parisian celebrity.

A little further on the viscount came upon an immense tent set up in the midst of a shady lawn. There was such a crowd in it that it was scarcely possible to find out what was going on inside. There were Dutch spinning-tops running steeple-chases, and "perfected" so as to be thus displayed, each top being of a different colour, and little leaden horses working on the roulette system as played at Monaco, the whole with money bets. As it may easily be believed, such extremely novel attractions as these drew a large crowd around the tables which, in addition, were presided over by elegant and attractive women of high standing—for gambling, being considered moral if its purpose be charity, is one of the greatest catch-pennies at a fair.

The highest stakes were a hundred francs, and a hundred louis might be won on such a bet. Savinien had only to watch the players to discover this, and he immediately recognised Glébof, who played with the same ardour as at the club, and was undoubtedly pursued by the same bad luck, for he did not appear to be pleased. The viscount, who did not care to talk to him, turned towards a table which he saw had been entrusted to the intelligent care of Madame de Gravigny. She was fulfilling her important duties with all the gravity of a croupier, and the exactitude necessary to the business, but she found time to talk to her friends, and as she had quite a fancy for Savinien she did not fail to call him to come to her. The round of the horses had just ended and the lucky number was being proclaimed.

"Quick, your five louis!" exclaimed the lady, "and sit down here by me. I want to bring you good luck, and have a little chat with you."

Savinien paid down his money, seeing no way to escape doing so. He did so with the better grace, as he hoped to obtain some information respecting Madame Montauron from the little countess.

"How do you think I am looking," he asked, without mincing matters in the least. "I was advised to dress as the Queen of Spades—an allusion to cards and gambling, you know!—but I thought I would do better than that, and so I contented myself with this bronze-green satin costume, and this little bonnet of steel lace. The thing is a perfect success, you see. No end of compliments on my appearance, and no end of money for the lucky orphans."

"You deserve the compliments," began the viscount, "and I——"

"Speaking of compliments," interrupted Madame de Gravigny, "I have just had one that I could very well have done without. Would you believe that Pinchard—you know, the usurer of the Rue Sainte-Anne—Pinchard, the scamp, has just told me that he won't renew my note? Did you ever hear such impertinence? And right in the midst of a charity fair! I'll bet anything that he only came here to say that spiteful thing to me, and after that he won the only round that has been won at my table. These low people are always lucky in money matters. By good luck I can afford to laugh at his threats. How about yourself?"

"Me!" stammered Savinien, who was far from expecting such a question.

"You don't care either, do you? I'm sure I don't know why I mentioned the disagreeable fellow to you. I had better be giving you a use-

ful hint, however. If you haven't yet seen Mademoiselle Fourcas you had better show yourself as soon as possible. There's a crowd about her, and new comers can't get near her."

"If I knew where she could be found I would go to her at once."

"She is selling cigars with Madame Montauron."

"What!" exclaimed Savinien, "are they going about through the crowd offering cigars to the passers-by?"

"Not at all! Customers come to them. They have a kiosk set up expressly for themselves, and I can assure you that they are doing a brisk business for the benefit of the orphans. I shouldn't be surprised if they make more than I do, although I have already taken five hundred louis. But Mademoiselle Fourcas's millions draw better than my little horses. Where's the young man who wouldn't be glad to buy a box of bad cigars from the heiress, and pay two hundred francs for it? It is like taking a lottery ticket, and the prize is her splendid dowry. One and all, they think that the heiress may be struck by their appearance, and that the money won't be thrown away. I am not in the matrimonial market myself, unfortunately. That's why I do not draw as well. I feel altogether inferior."

"But you are not inferior."

"Do you know, now, that you have really a chance in that quarter? You look as if you didn't know it. Well, then, I assure you that you have. You may believe what I say. I know what I am talking about, and I can certify that the fair Julia likes you very much indeed. How have you progressed in your courtship since the famous Friday when you accompanied her while she sang the 'Erl-King'?"

"I have seen her but once, and that was by chance."

"What! Haven't you called upon her guardian?"

"No. I did not even think of calling."

"That is unpardonable. You must do so at once."

"But, madame, why should I?"

"Good heavens! do you mean to let such a chance as that slip through your fingers? You would be sorry as long as you lived. I advise you to make haste, though, for you have some formidable competitors. There's a marquis, a member of the Jockey Club, and that is enough to turn the uncle's brain, and the niece's, too. He isn't as good looking as you are, but he is not at all bad looking, either. I'll bet anything that he is hanging round the 'tobacco-stall' at this moment. You had better not let him have things all his own way."

Savinien was about to ask a question which the lady's interruptions had constantly prevented him from enunciating, but this time again she would not allow him to say a single word.

"What is the number of your ticket?" she suddenly asked.

"Seven, I believe."

"You have lost, then. See, the horse that belongs to that ticket is distanced by three lengths. The horse ahead of him is mine, and in advance of that comes number nine. I must speak to the winner. I wish you had been the man; but, at all events, the winner isn't that abominable Pinchard. Besides, you'll be luckier another time. Will you begin again? No. You had rather buy a cigar of Mademoiselle Fourcas than bet on my horses, and I don't blame you, for my part."

With this Madame de Gravigny turned to one of the bettors, saying: "Have you number nine, sir?"

Viscount d'Amaulis profited by this opportunity to leave the table

where he had lost five louis and his time besides. At a turn in the walk he came upon his cousin Adhémar, who said to him, in a jocular tone :

"For mercy's sake tell me what I am to do with these odious boxes?" and he held out a couple of cigar boxes with both hands. He had yet two more, one under each arm.

"Where did you get them?" asked Savinien.

"At a booth where you are now going, most likely. Madame Montauron is there, and Mademoiselle Fourcas is selling abominable cigars over a counter, with her own snowy hands. This is what has made me assume the appearance of an errand-boy from the Grand Hôtel. I am taking away a thousand francs' worth of 'unsmokables,' and I would give ten louis to get rid of my boxes. I should like to pitch the whole lot behind some of these trees."

"That would be highly improper."

"Of course it would. I cannot, with any decency, ask you to take one or two boxes, as you will be laden like me in five minutes from now."

"I hope not. Cigars at that price are too dear for me."

"Do you think that I wanted to buy them? But what can a man do when Mademoiselle Fourcas is the dealer? Between ourselves, I think that she took a malicious pleasure in loading me with these horrid things. It is a good way to stop a conversation which prevents one from making sales. The unlucky buyer bends beneath the weight of his purchases, presents an appearance altogether too ridiculous, and yields his place to some one else. Such is my experience, and I trust that yours may not be the same."

"I think not. Mademoiselle Fourcas only treats her friends in that way, and I have not set eyes on her since we met in the Bois de Boulogne."

M. de Laffemas understood at once the meaning of this remark, and very frankly replied: "My dear cousin, you cannot have forgotten that on the morning of that happy day, as we were leaving the Allée des Poteaux, you assured me that I should not be interfering with your plans by paying attention to Mademoiselle Fourcas. It was a generous assurance on your part, for she likes you very much, and if you chose to court her yourself, you would have every chance of success. But, as you leave the field free, I have a right to take advantage of your own assurances and advance my own pretensions."

"Certainly you have, and I suppose that you have succeeded."

"I am getting on very well, and as I wish to be perfectly open with you, I must tell you that, thanks to that worthy Bricourt, who showed me the stables, I have made the acquaintance of Monsieur Fourcas, the uncle, and won his favour. It was not difficult, I must admit. He is fond of people with titles. He was immensely pleased when I proposed getting him an invitation, this autumn, to my friend Chadeuil's château."

"His niece is probably fond of titles, also."

"Not at all! But I hope to bring her over. She would not be a woman if she could not understand the charm of select society. It is no easy thing to open the doors of our set to the daughter of a man of money. But I have hit on an ingenious plan. Chadeuil and his wife, to whom I have confided my projects, have promised me to come to this fair. This will give an excellent opportunity for an introduction to Monsieur Fourcas and his niece. An invitation to a grand hunt will follow, and it remains for me to do the rest. Am I frank, or am I not?"

"I am greatly obliged to you, cousin, for speaking so plainly," said Viscount d'Amaulis, somewhat stiffly.

"It is quite natural that I should tell you just how I am situated. You are more than my relative, you are my friend, and I hope that we shall never have any secrets from one another. But let me ask you if you are still waiting for Aparanda's seconds to appear?"

"I have not the least expectation that they will do so."

"You would do as well to refuse to receive them if they took it into their heads to do so now. I am delighted that the affair has stopped short as it has. That man is a good-for-nothing fellow, and you would have done him too much honour in fighting with him. You never go now, I believe, to the club which he honours by his patronage?"

"No. And I shall soon hand in my resignation."

"That would have a good effect as regards the Jockey. You know that there is an election there next week. I have good hopes for you, but I should like to be able to say that you resigned your membership at the Plungers' as soon as you knew what it amounted to. This sacrifice, which can't be called such, will get you ten white balls more."

"I shall make it. But let me ask you whether you met Pinchard here."

"I should think so, indeed! He says that he expects his money on the fifteenth of June, the monster! Did he call upon you to come to terms by that date?"

"Yes, and I must confess that I am very much put out by it."

"Don't be uneasy; the race for the Grand Prize of Paris will set us going again. But I must leave you now, as I intend making a present of these cigars to my coachman outside. He alone is capable of smoking them, and I already have cramps in my arms from carrying them about. I shall be back directly to look up Chadeuil, and I shall no doubt see you again. You are going to the kiosk, are you not?"

"Yes, I must pay my respects to Madame Montauron," replied Savinien eagerly. "Where is the kiosk to be found?"

"Just over there behind that clump of chestnut-trees. I will join you there if you will wait for me."

"Thanks, and good-bye till I see you again," replied Savinien, who now succeeded in making his escape, and found himself, after walking on a little way, in front of a handsome wooden building, run up at the edge of a broad walk in the midst of flowers.

It was a kiosk such as might have been found on the banks of the Bosphorus, and the architect who had built it had evidently been inspired by recollections of the East, for his construction was as near as possible a copy of the building which stands near the celebrated "Fountain of Ahmed" at Constantinople. Below a varnished roof raised at its angles there were gilded wirework openings, and—instead of marble basins filled with limpid water—any number of rosewood shelves covered with cigar-boxes.

Mademoiselle Fourcas was standing in front of these shelves, besieged by gentlemen, and very busily distributing the cigars handed to her by Madame Montauron, who, seated upon a raised platform in the middle of the kiosk, received money on all sides, throwing it uncounted into a basket by her side.

Savinien stopped a moment to look at the sight. Julia Fourcas, in a simple white dress, had never seemed to him so pretty. Madame Mon-

tauron, in a dress of dull red watered faille, had never looked more beautiful. As he advanced he created a decided effect, for Madame Fourcas turned red, and Madame Montauron turned white.

He bowed without embarrassment, however, although the situation was a trying one, and was drawing out his purse to pay for a purchase to make himself the more welcome, when the heiress addressed him in these words:

"It is heaven that sends you, Monsieur d'Amaulis. We are almost distracted, and Madame Montauron is nearly exhausted. Come and help us."

"What, mademoiselle, would you have me take your place?" asked Savinien. "The buyers as well as the poor would lose too much by that!"

"That isn't the question. Men don't know how to sell, but they know how to count, and how to take down boxes. I myself get confused as to the payments, and Madame Montauron is half dead with handing me cigars. You can be our cashier and our shop-boy, too."

"But, mademoiselle, I——"

"Oh, no objections! My patroness here ordered me to engage your services as soon as you appeared. You come late, but you can make up for lost time."

"By buying all the cigars that you wish to sell me?"

"No! no! not now! I have other customers to serve. You must wait until I am not so busy. It isn't your money we want but your help. Go round to the door of the kiosk and come in. The door is over there!"

Savinien felt that he must needs obey. Madame Montauron, having thought of this plan for talking with her champion, would not have forgiven him had he failed to turn it to account. So he freed himself from the throng of people gathered around the counter, who looked enviously at him while Mademoiselle Fourcas so flatteringly welcomed him, and reached the door which she had designated. He had only to push it open to penetrate into a retreat ingeniously constructed so as to shield the ladies of the kiosk from all eyes whenever they chose to enter it. Behind pyramids of cigar-boxes were several bamboo chairs, a toilet-table with all its accessories, and a table covered with refreshments.

Savinien now found himself face to face with Madame Montauron, who had risen and entered the retreat to meet him.

"Forgive me," said she, in a low tone, "for asking you to come here. I feared that I should not find one moment's freedom during the whole time of the fair, and I must speak to you at all hazards."

"Four boxes of cigars, sir, if you please," said Mademoiselle Fourcas, pulling Savinien by the sleeve, and while he was handing them to her she added, in a whisper: "Why have I not seen you since you frightened me so much?"

"Frightened you! How?" stammered Viscount d'Amaulis.

"Would you deny that you had words with that foreigner?"

"But, mademoiselle——"

"A quarrel," interrupted Mademoiselle Fourcas, "of which I was perhaps the cause. If I had not been with you, you would have returned that man's bow. I have been dying of anxiety for three days past. It is very bad behaviour on your part."

"Could I suppose that you——"

Here Mademoiselle Fourcas suddenly returned to the counter and began distributing her cigars with many smiles.

"Don't you know that she is in love with you?" asked Madame Montauron in a low tone.

"With me, madame!" exclaimed Savinien, overcome with astonishment.

"I am sure of it, and, in the horrible situation in which I find myself, it is a consolation to me to think that I have contributed to the happiness of the only friend remaining to me."

"Let us speak of your troubles, I beg of you, madame," said Savinien, without referring to the other matter. "What has been done? What is this man doing? Has Brigitte discovered anything?"

"Nothing! nothing! I am ignorant of what he may have done with my daughter, and the delay which he has granted is about to expire. I hardly exist; I cannot endure what I am suffering! Whatever may be the consequences, even though they be ruin, even though I might find myself forced to confess all to my husband, I cannot continue as I now am! I rely on you alone to help me."

"What can I do?"

"Recover my casket, no matter what happens in consequence."

"You no longer fear Monsieur Montauron's appearing on the moment, then!"

"Here are twelve louis, sir?" cried Mademoiselle Fourcas, coming towards the retreat. "Please put them in the cash-box, and be kind enough to count our receipts in that basket. I cannot count very well, and besides, I have no time."

"I will try, mademoiselle," replied Savinien, coming forward to receive the money.

"Do you know what reassured me?" resumed the young girl, in quite a different tone of voice. "It was the Marquis de Laffemas coming to the Avenue du Trocadéro expressly to tell me that you would not be obliged to meet that horrible man. He came expressly for that, or, rather, to be introduced to my uncle, and, between ourselves, I think he is courting me."

"I will attend to you, sir," resumed the young girl, turning away to serve a purchaser who was brandishing a hundred-franc note.

Savinien returned to Madame Montauron. He began to be bewildered as to which lady to listen to.

"My husband cannot control you," said she eagerly. "You deposited the casket and you have a right to take it back."

"Undoubtedly, but what if he sees it?"

"Do you think that he would attempt to wrest it from you?"

"If he did, I should know how to prevent it, but what should I do with the coffer itself?"

"I will tell you. My resolution is taken, and I——"

"Five louis more!" cried out the young lady, coming from the counter.

"Well, sir, how does our money stand?"

"I am going to count it, mademoiselle," stammered Savinien, whose brain was beginning to whirl.

"Your cousin is here, did you know that? I have sold him a great many cigars. You cannot imagine how funny he looked when he had bought the whole pile of them!"

"I met him just now."

"Did he tell you that he was coming back with the Countess de Chadeuil, who intends honouring me with a most flattering invitation? But, great heavens! look!" suddenly exclaimed Mademoiselle Fourcas, "look at that woman! How strangely she is dressed! Isn't it the same woman who spoke to you in such a bold way in the Allée des Poteaux?"

Savinien looked into the crowd to find the person spoken of by Mademoiselle Fourcas, and he had no difficulty in recognising Anita, although she wore a costume which was far from creditable to her taste. Under pretence of exactly copying the fashions of the day of the Directory she had donned a hat of fluted tulle, ornamented with a tricoloured plume, and, over a skirt of orange satin covered with flounces of Spanish lace, she wore a coat of the style called *incroyable*, or *incredible*—as indeed it was at that period—a salmon-coloured coat with the front and flaps turned back, and blue bands across the breast; thereto was added a blue satin waistcoat with gold “frogs,” while a couple of watch-chains, such as were worn in Barras’s time, hung about her waist.

Her demeanour was as eccentric as her dress, and even giddier, and more calculated to attract attention. She looked as though she had come—as she had, in point of fact—to create a scandal by picking a quarrel with some lady of high social standing. It seemed as though she was trying to make everybody stare, in order the better to carry out her hidden purpose. Savinien already foresaw that a disagreeable scene was about to take place, a scene into which he would of necessity be dragged.

“It is really Madame Blue-Beard,” resumed Mademoiselle Fourcas. “She has unparalleled boldness. You had better stand a little back, or she will begin to talk to you. You know by experience what she has the audacity to do,” added the heiress, smiling somewhat sarcastically.

“I hope that she will not have the impertinence to come near you,” stammered Viscount d’Amaulis, reddening to the roots of the hair.

“Oh, I can defend myself very well if she does, but you had better defend *yourself* by flying. Come, turn your back to her! You know that you have to count the cash.”

Savinien, who was extremely vexed, controlled himself, and made up his mind to follow this somewhat sarcastic advice. He stepped back and leaned over the basket filled with gold and bank notes so as to be able to command his features. This brought him nearer to Madame Montauron, who was only too glad to be able to resume the conversation previously interrupted by Mademoiselle Fourcas.

“You can spare me the agony of confessing everything to my husband,” said she to Savinien. “When you have regained possession of the coffer, keep it instead of returning it to me, and treat with Count Aparanda yourself. Offer him my diamonds if he will give me back my daughter. He will sell them himself.”

“That is precisely what he proposed, and I refused. How can any confidence be placed in his promises? He would keep the diamonds and break his word.”

“You can force him to keep it by demanding he should take you to the place where my daughter lives.”

“But I should not know her.”

“Brigitte will go with you, and when she has recognised my child she will pay her ransom and take her to a house which will be ready to receive her.”

“Nothing proves that the count will consent to this,” urged Savinien.

“Everything, on the contrary, does prove it. It is the money he wants, not the child. He knows what such diamonds as mine must be worth. Why should he refuse to make the exchange when it would give him two hundred thousand francs?”

Savinien was about to offer fresh objections, when Mademoiselle Four-

cas came towards him and said, in a low tone : "Don't turn round. The woman with the tricolour feather shows no disposition to go off. One would vow that she knows you are here. The worst of it is that there is a crowd around her already. If she stays much longer there will be a mob. Heaven knows what she will do next to astonish the gaping multitude. She is capable of buying cigars and smoking them in the park."

"Who are you talking about?" asked Madame Montauron, coming forward.

"Monsieur d'Amaulis will tell you. It will be a good punishment. I haven't the time. My customers want me." With this Julia returned to the counter, in front of which there was still a throng of gentlemen.

Savinien was obliged to explain matters as follows : "Mademoiselle Fourcas alludes to a woman who ought not to be here, a woman who makes herself much too conspicuous, and ought not to have been allowed to come here at all."

"I was afraid that something of the kind would occur, and that was why I did not wish that the fair should be open to the public. No one agreed with me in the matter, and it was simply decided that no woman should be allowed to enter without a gentleman. Some one must have been bold enough to escort this person."

Savinien became more anxious when he heard these words, for he concluded that Anita's escort was in all probability Aparanda.

"You know the woman, do you not?" said Madame Montauron. "Mademoiselle Fourcas seems to be afraid that she will speak to you."

"It is the actress who gave the card-party at which Count Aparanda was present."

"Count Aparanda!" exclaimed Madame Montauron, turning deadly pale. She immediately concluded that the count had accompanied the woman in question to the fair in order to insult her by bringing such a creature to her park. She summoned courage, however, to look up and examine Anita, who stood a little way off.

"What a dress! What a manner! What boldness!" said Madame Montauron. "How is it that Mademoiselle Fourcas can know her even by sight?"

"She saw her at the Bois de Boulogne. I was there escorting Mademoiselle Fourcas, who was riding. This woman passed by on horseback, and had the boldness to stop and speak to me."

"Ah! I understand now."

"I need not tell you how I received her. I don't think she will care to do the same thing again."

"It is better, however, that she shouldn't catch sight of you. Pretend to be counting the money and listen to what I still have to say to you. Should Monsieur Montauron come upon you when you are removing the casket say that it is yours. He will be obliged to content himself with your assertion."

"He cannot, as head of the Provincial Bank, take away a deposit belonging to a subscriber; but his mind will be made up, for he will recognise the coffer as yours when he sees it in my hands. I can bear the position in which this would place me, though it would be a strange one and hard for a gentleman to endure, for the more reason as Monsieur Montauron and Baron de Trémorin's nephew could hardly fight a duel. But what will you say, madame, when he asks you what has become of your diamonds?"

"I shall say that I have lost them or that they have been stolen; I will answer no matter what! Don't think of me, sir, think only of saving my daughter. My husband will not, perhaps, believe me, but he will never guess the truth; and even should he drive from his house I shall not shrink from my resolution, and I will expiate the just consequences of my fault without a murmur."

"No, he will not guess the facts, but he will believe that I, I whom he welcomed so cordially, have deceived him."

"Do you mean that he will believe that you are or have been my lover? That is impossible! Such a suspicion is absurd. I saw you for the first time when you came to Paris a month ago. I have scarcely seen you since. Doesn't he know, besides, that my most ardent wish is to marry you to a charming young girl, Mademoiselle Fourcas? And will he not soon learn that you are about to marry her?"

"I think not," replied Savinien, promptly.

"Must I, in order to convince you, question Julia? Ah! I should be happy indeed if I could prove to you this very day that you can, if you like, become her husband."

"Will you have the kindness, sir," called out Mademoiselle Fourcas, without raising her voice too much, "to take down that huge box which is on the top of that pyramid there and give it to me, but without turning round, as the befeathered female is still here. She is walking up and down, and stretching her neck out like an ostrich. She seems to be on the look-out for some one."

Viscount d'Amaulis did as the heiress requested, and while he was counting some money which she handed to him she said: "Oh! here he is! Here's the person whom the woman with the feather was waiting for! I felt sure it would be he! It is! It is Blue-Beard himself!"

Madame Montauron failed to understand whom the fair Julia was calling by the name of Blue-Beard, but Savinien at once understood her meaning, and his first impulse was to turn and face this odious foe.

It was, indeed, Count Aparanda, advancing proudly towards the be-plumed princess. She caught sight of him, and leaving the throng which had gathered round her, went towards him. Savinien saw her take the Swede's arm, as if to proclaim that he was her escort.

What would the couple now do? Was it chance that had brought them together at this spot and time, or had they agreed to meet at a few steps from the stall presided over by the wife of the director of the Provincial Bank?

If they had chosen this particular spot, it was, assuredly, not without some motive, some hostile intent. Count Aparanda was well aware that in coming to this fair he was coming to M. Montauron's house, and it was the height of audacity to have done so with so conspicuous and outrageously dressed a woman. This bold bravado might be a sudden and fatal blow to the unfortunate mother of the child that he was so strangely hiding. How could that mother, who, as yet, did not know what was about to take place, be protected? Her attention was engrossed with what she wished her young protector to do on her behalf. While Mademoiselle Fourcas was talking to Viscount d'Amaulis, Madame Montauron had withdrawn to some little distance, and had not yet caught sight of the man whom she feared so much.

Savinien, for a moment, thought of leaving the kiosk to try and prevent anything further from occurring. But how could he effect this?

Madame Montauron would certainly ask him why he so suddenly deserted her, and his meeting with the count would take place too near the kiosk. She would not fail to witness all that transpired, and she would recognise her persecutor. It would undoubtedly be better to persuade her to retire behind the huge piles of cigar-boxes, but how could he find a reason for such a request, and for following her, if she consented to comply with it? Besides, the dastardly Aparanda had undoubtedly seen her, and was fully capable of stationing himself in front of the kiosk, and of remaining there till she came out.

"What was Mademoiselle Fourcas saying to you?" asked Madame Montauron.

"She is afraid this woman will come near us, and she thinks that you had better go away," replied the viscount, profiting by this opportunity to suggest the course which had occurred to him. "If you go to the further end of the kiosk you will be out of her reach, and we can converse at liberty."

Madame Montauron would have been only too glad to profit by the chance of being able to speak further of her wishes, but she could not forget that Mademoiselle Fourcas had been placed in her care.

"I cannot do so," she replied. "This young girl must not be left alone here. I promised her uncle that I would watch over her. It is not at the very moment when she is exposed to unpleasant contact that I ought to leave her alone. My duty is to keep close to her, and if the woman in question makes a scene I ought to be there to prevent it from going on."

Savinien could not find a suitable reply to this declaration. Besides, it was too late to prevent the encounter, for Anita, after talking for some time with her escort, now dropped his arm, and approached the counter at which Mademoiselle Fourcas was still attending upon her customers.

It was easy to see from her insolent air that she had an aggressive intention, and the men about her began to follow her out of sheer curiosity. At all times and in all places there are people who like to look on if they think that there is a quarrel or any exciting scene at hand.

The Swede kept back, to the great astonishment of Savinien, who expected to see him support Anita's evidently premeditated onset. He even seemed to be trying to disappear in the crowd which was stationed at a short distance from a stall which it was needless to approach unless one cared to expend at least a hundred francs. He disappeared so quickly that Madame Montauron did not see him at all. Her whole attention was for the moment fixed upon the impertinent woman who now looked as though she were about to besiege the kiosk.

Savinien had so placed himself as to help Madame Montauron or Mademoiselle Fourcas if they needed his intervention. On his left hand and somewhat in the rear, Madame Montauron held herself in readiness to intervene if her young charge were annoyed; she kept her eyes upon her and almost turned her back to the people scattered over the lawn. On the right hand and well in advance, Mademoiselle Fourcas continued serving her customers with perfect ease, although she saw the audacious Anita coming towards her with the gait of a drum-major, and holding a pretty purse with golden links in her hand.

"After all," thought Savinien, "she will, perhaps, content herself with throwing down a few bank-notes for the benefit of the orphans,

so as to dazzle the crowd of fools looking on. If Aparanda hides himself it is because he has no evil design."

Anita was now within a few steps of the counter. Some of the buyers made room for her to approach. "Mademoiselle," said she, taking a handful of gold from her purse, and chinking it in her delicately gloved hands, "I want to buy some Russian cigarettes."

"I have none," quietly replied the heiress.

"Ah, indeed! That is a pity. So much the worse for the poor, for I cannot carry a box of cigars, you know, and I meant to spend ten louis at this stall."

"You can easily spend them at some other one, madame."

"Oh, I know that very well, but it's not the same thing. I should have liked to take a pleasant souvenir away from this kiosk. But I can leave one here. Here are a hundred francs, mademoiselle."

"Have the kindness to give them to the lady-almoners, mademoiselle," replied the young girl, with perfect composure, "I do not do anything but sell."

"That is strange! I did not think you were so particular at these charity fairs. The other day at the fair for the Greeks of Chio, I saw a countess kiss one of my friends, who gave her a thousand francs on condition that she would do so."

Savinien, who, red with anger, was listening to Anita's remarks, thought that she had gone too far, and that it was time to prevent her from speaking further. Encouraged by a look from Madame Montauron, and forgetting that the poor woman's enemy was not far off, he stepped forward.

"Dear me! is it you, viscount?" exclaimed Anita. "Where have you been hiding? I haven't seen you in three weeks past, and I have been looking for you all the time. Since you are here I haven't spent my time for nothing. In the first place, here are my five louis which the young lady won't take, I do not know why, but *you*, at least, are a friend."

Mademoiselle Fourcas's calmness did not hold out against this malicious assertion. She had scorned Anita's insulting familiarities, but she became confused when Viscount d'Amaulis was brought into the discussion. Her face changed, and tears came to her eyes. Savinien opened his lips to reply sharply to the audacious attack of the Swede's favourite, but before he could utter a word an unlooked-for auxiliary suddenly appeared in the person of an elderly gentleman with grey hair and a white moustache who came forward to the railing in front of the counter, and looking straight in Anita's face, exclaimed in a firm tone: "I advise you to go away; this is no place for you."

"What, do *you* take sides against me, baron?" said Anita, with an attempt at careless indifference which ill accorded with the embarrassment visible on her countenance.

It was very evident that this "baron," whoever he might be, had some power over her, and that his interference intimidated her. "Don't insist upon remaining," said he, "and go at once, unless you wish me to use other means to oblige you to do so."

Anita was choking with anger, but she apparently realised that she was not the stronger, and so got ready to retreat.

"I did not come here alone," she stammered, looking about her to see what had become of her escort.

At this moment Aparanda made his appearance. Madame Montauron

who was engaged in consoling the pretty Julia, did not catch sight of him at once.

"What are you interfering for, sir?" said the Swede to the gentleman whom Anita had addressed as "baron." "This lady came here with me, and I am ready to answer you if you have anything to say in the matter."

"Very well," replied the gentleman, who appeared to be an elderly officer of rank, perhaps a retired general, "it is to you, then, that I will address myself, and as it is not necessary for these ladies to hear what we may have to say, be kind enough to follow me to the end of this lawn."

This invitation did not suit Aparanda, who was evidently trying to prolong the scene, but he could not decline, as all eyes were upon him, and he saw too late that he had taken the wrong tack. Had he been dealing with Savinien d'Amaulis he would not have feared the scandal of a discussion, as his adversary would have been restrained by the peculiarities of the position, but this baron, who evidently belonged to good society, had certainly some strong reasons for treating Anita with such severity, and Madame Montauron's presence did not at all restrain him from showing his scornful displeasure or induce him to spare the actress's escort, and he started towards the grove from which he had emerged a moment before. Anita's defender followed him, and a discussion began between them, lively enough to judge by the gesticulations, but carried on in a tolerably low tone of voice.

Anita, finding herself no longer supported, had quietly beaten a retreat, and did not appear to be inclined to await the end of the dispute. Despite the course she was now pursuing, she was not really wanting in intelligence, and she saw that she had nothing to gain by taking part in the discussion, and indeed she began to regret having played the paltry, stupid, and spiteful part assigned to her by Aparanda.

Unfortunately, however, Madame Montauron had raised her head, and finding herself unexpectedly confronted by the man whom she had once so madly loved, and who had now become her enemy, and seeing him in the company of an actress of dissolute morals who had apparently entered the kiosk for the sole purpose of insulting her at his instigation, she could not endure so painful a shock, and fainted away. Savinien d'Amaulis had but time to catch her in his arms as Aparanda and the baron turned and left the counter, and to bear her to the further end of the kiosk, where she was protected from the gaze of malicious curiosity.

Fortunately the public was much less taken up with her swoon than with watching the result of Anita's pranks, and so the sudden disappearance of the banker's wife passed almost unperceived by the buyers and the idlers gathered near by. Mademoiselle Fourcas alone guessed that something extraordinary had taken place, and showed unusual coolness. The case was an embarrassing one. She would have preferred to have gone to Madame Montauron's assistance, but her instinct as a woman warned her that she would be in the way if she did so, and besides, by leaving her post at the counter she would only attract additional attention to the affair, which would at once become the subject of general comment. So she remained at her post and waited upon the gentlemen who came up, smiling with apparent carelessness as she took their money, paying equal attention to one and all of them, and even taking care not to glance towards the spot where the quarrel brought about by Anita's behaviour was going on.

Meantime, Madame Montauron, pale and trembling, said to Savinien: "I am lost!"

"Lost?" replied the viscount. "What! because that miserable scoundrel has had the audacity to exhibit himself here with a reckless woman?"

"This infamous act is equal to a declaration of war. It is as though he gave me to understand that he will no longer hesitate at anything."

"I shall not hesitate at anything either," replied Savinien. "He has gone too far now, and I wish to bring this matter to an end. To-morrow, madame, I will do what you requested me to do a moment ago. I will take back your casket, no matter what may happen, and I will go to Count Aparanda and force him to make terms."

"I don't wish you to expose yourself to danger on my account. Promise to let me know if he tries to drag you into a duel. You cannot fight with him! I would rather throw myself at my husband's feet and confess everything to him."

"In that case Monsieur Montauron would be obliged to fight with him! But there will be no fighting, at least so I hope, not even with the kind gentleman whom I am longing to thank for his generous intervention. By driving this woman away he has protected Mademoiselle Fourcas from the most odious impertinence."

"You remind me that the poor girl is all alone, and that it is my duty to return to her," said Madame Montauron, rising, although still pale and weak from her recent swoon. "To-day I must not think of myself, and I shall not abandon Julia, even although this unscrupulous coward should again insult me."

On returning to the front of the kiosk, Savinien now found that the aspect of matters had changed. There were more customers than ever at Mademoiselle Fourcas' counter, but the Swede and the gentleman who had prevented either some outrageous scandal or an absolutely fatal result from Anita's impertinence, had both of them disappeared. Anita had also vanished, and the idle lookers-on had dispersed. Promenaders who had freshly arrived were coming up on every side.

Savinien, reassured, saw one whom he did not care to wait for in the kiosk. It was Adhémar de Laffemas, rid of his boxes, and approaching along a by-path. Savinien resolved to yield him, without demur, his own place near Julia Fourcas, with whom the marquis evidently desired to resume his flirtation. So the viscount escaped while Madame Montauron was talking with her young charge, cutting across the lawn in order to reach the shade of a convenient hedge. But he had counted without his cousin, who accosted him, asking, "Are you running after Anita?"

"No, indeed! Why do you ask me such a question as that?"

"Because I just met Cavaroc, who has been telling me a pretty tale about this woman's strange behaviour."

"Who may Cavaroc be?"

"Colonel Cavaroc, don't you know? He is one of my club friends. It appears that just now he went to the kiosk where Mademoiselle Fourcas sells cigars, and arrived there at the moment when Anita was behaving in the most audacious manner. He knows her low origin, and it is said that she has swindled one of his friends out of a deal of money, so that she cannot very well afford to make an enemy of him. He had only to say a word to her to make her take flight. But the funniest part of the story is that Aparanda took sides with her. He has found a rough customer to deal with, however, for Cavaroc isn't to be trifled with, and is a perfect master with all weapons. He gave a thorough tongue-lashing to that

scamp, who left him saying that he would send his seconds to him *to-morrow*. I told the colonel that he need not expect them then or ever, and I gave him the fullest particulars as to this individual. But I shouldn't be surprised if something more resulted from all this, as Cavaroc is the very man to box the Swede's ears the first time he meets him."

Savinien said nothing. He thought that he had no time to lose in carrying out Madame Montauron's instructions, and he now longed to leave the fair.

"It would be a good thing if he did," resumed Adhémar; "but I see that you want to go, and I must give you a message confided to me. A person who knows you, and knows that I am your cousin, told me just now that Monsieur Montauron was looking everywhere for you."

"Indeed!" replied Savinien. "What can he want with me?"

"If he wants to give you unlimited credit, I shouldn't refuse if I were you, and I should like to be in your place if he does so," replied M. de Laffemas, laughing. "I must leave you now, my dear fellow," he added, "I have not the honour of knowing Monsieur Montauron, who must, moreover, wish to speak to you privately, and I want to go to Mademoiselle Fourcas' kiosk. Now that I have paid my quota, and have no more boxes to carry, I am going to try to get inside. I heard that you were there just now."

"Madame Montauron wished to have my help," replied Savinien, "the two ladies couldn't wait on all the purchasers that came."

"Then they must be badly off now that you have deserted them, and I hope they will take me in your place. Ah, cousin, if I succeed in pleasing that fair young lady over there, I shall be under obligations to you all my life, for without you I should never have become acquainted with this charming creature with such beautiful eyes and such a beautiful fortune!"

"Good luck go with you, cousin," replied Viscount d'Amaulis, somewhat drily.

Taking a side path, he now went on, resolving to trust to chance to meet M. Montauron. The path which he was following passed in front of the tent where the dairy was installed, and a crowd of pretty women dressed as milk-maids were busy there. At the gate beyond the tent, behind which stood the lady almoners and the young girls selling programmes, Savinien saw that there was an unusual stir. A group of people had scattered, and were following a couple whom he easily recognised. Every one was laughing, and jostling his or her neighbour. A clear space was left, however, to allow a man to pass along with a strangely attired companion, a woman.

There was almost a mob, and Savinien saw that Anita and her braggart cavalier were being escorted in a manner with which they would gladly have dispensed, and which was certainly far from flattering. As was always the case, whenever the Scandinavian appeared anywhere, he had excited dislike of the most obvious kind. He did not appear at all disposed to brave the thing out, for he was decamping as fast as possible. Savinien saw the pair get into a victoria, and they were driven off, while the crowd quietly wended its way back to the lawns and groves.

"Madame Montauron has guessed the truth," said Savinien to himself. "This man is prepared to commit some final infamy and then to decamp for ever, for he has placed himself under the absolute necessity of leaving

Paris by this conduct of his to-day. He has been in good society and he knows the customs there. He knows perfectly well the effect of his acts, and he must be aware that after such a performance he would be badly received, even at the Plungers' Club. He must, therefore, have made up his mind to go away, and as regards the unfortunate woman who is the object of his cruel and unaccountable persecution, he is about to proceed to the last extremities. He only appeared before her with Anita in order to terrify her, and he relies upon her fears of a final irrevocable scandal to make her submit to his exactions. She is right in saying that it is now too late to hesitate. I will recover the casket to-morrow, happen what may, and I will treat with this heartless villain for the ransom of the child. It will be difficult to manage, no doubt, but I have given my word, and I will carry the matter through. But when Madame Montauron has recovered her daughter, I shall steadfastly refrain from mixing myself up in her affairs."

As the viscount mentally came to this determination, a hand was laid upon his shoulder. He turned round and saw M. Montauron, who was all smiles, before him.

"Here you are at last!" said the banker. "I have been looking for you everywhere."

"I am sorry that you had so much trouble to find me, sir. My cousin, Monsieur de Laffemas, told me but a moment ago that you were looking for me."

"Were you about to leave?"

"I was looking——"

"At that creature who had the boldness to come here? She made a great mistake, it seems, and had a lively time of it before she got away. It is none the less to be regretted that she should have come, and I am very sorry that I did not follow my wife's advice in having some persons at the entrance who would know exactly whom to admit. I didn't think, I must say, that any man would be bold enough to come here with a woman of such behaviour and appearance."

"He is probably as objectionable as she is," muttered Savinien.

"I don't know what he may amount to by this time, but I am aware that formerly he was received everywhere. He left Paris a short time before my marriage took place, and came back quite recently, I am told. I had not seen him for thirteen or fourteen years, but I recognised him at once when I saw him pass by with that creature on his arm. I remembered his name when I saw him. He is a Swede, and he is called Count Aparanda. But you were there, were you not, when his companion was trying to get up a scene? Tell me exactly what took place."

"Nothing of any consequence," replied the viscount, with no little embarrassment. "She spoke improperly to Mademoiselle Fourcas. Colonel Cavaroc, who, it appears, knows who she is, silenced her. The foreigner interfered, but the colonel soon reduced him to silence in turn, and the whole affair did not last three minutes."

"So I was told; but I should like to know whether Madame Montauron was concerned in the matter directly or indirectly."

"Not in the smallest degree, sir, I can assure you."

"So much the better, for had this man insulted her I should consider it my business to punish him, and I don't care to have anything to do with a fellow who has lost his social standing. But let us say no more about the matter, and do me the favour to come with me," said the

banker, passing his arm through that of Savinien, who timidly asked :
"May I inquire where you are taking me?"

"To the kiosk where Mademoiselle Fourcas is effecting such splendid sales to the great advantage of the orphans."

"Excuse me, but I have just left it," replied Savinien.

"So much the better. When a man has seen Mademoiselle Fourcas once he naturally wishes to see her again."

"Certainly; but there is a great crowd there, and I should be afraid——"

"You might be in the way of your cousin, the Marquis de Laffemas?" interrupted M. Montauron. "Have you made up your mind, then, to leave him master of the field?" he added, laughing.

"What do you mean by that, sir?"

"Why! he is making fierce love to Mademoiselle Fourcas. I know that from good authority; and only yesterday I should have earnestly begged you not to yield your place to him, but within an hour I have changed my mind with regard to the matter, and it is not because I wish to take you back to that charming young lady that I now ask you to accompany me."

Savinien turned slightly pale. It seemed to him that M. Montauron's lively manner was assumed to hide something of a serious nature, and that he was about to confront him with his wife.

"I am not thinking of Mademoiselle Fourcas," added the banker, "but there is some one there who is impatiently looking for you."

"I confess that I cannot guess who it is," said Savinien.

"I hope not! If you did guess, the effect of the meeting would be thrown away. It is a surprise which I have in store for you."

"I am at your orders, sir."

"An agreeable surprise, mind. It would have come about sooner if I could have managed it, but as it is you will not lose anything by the delay, I will answer for that. Come, my dear sir, it is only a step from here. You cannot imagine," added the banker as they walked on, "how difficult it was to arrange everything for this fair."

"It is a complete success," said the viscount.

"Everybody had some motive in wishing to help in it. Young girls on the look out for husbands, women who wanted to deepen the impression which they had already made upon some admirer, others who wished to be remarked as having made the largest sales, all these had motives for making themselves conspicuous, and among the latter, some, I know, would empty their own pockets to display a better filled cash-box than those of the other stalls."

"So much the better for the poor."

"True, but I assure you that these ladies trouble themselves very little about that part of the matter. If charity were their object they would give the poor the money which they spend on the dresses they are displaying here."

"You are too severe, sir."

"No, I am just. The proof is that they will abandon their posts at night time, because their charming faces and pretty dresses cannot then be seen to so great advantage. The park is so large that it cannot be lighted to seem like daylight. Then the men will profit by the dimness to purchase a great deal less or not at all."

"You do not spare your own sex," said Savinien, laughing.

"No. But you will confess, my dear sir, that you did not come here on account of the poor orphans for whom the fair is given, although you have handed some money over to our lady-almoners, no doubt.

"No, I did not come on their account alone, but still——"

"It is not a reproach I make," interrupted the banker, "the gainers will be the poor girls whom you would not have thought of helping if Madame Montauron had not thought of giving the entertainment."

"You will confess that Madame Montauron, at least, had nothing to gain by all this !" said the viscount.

"Who knows ? She has the pleasure of taking charge of Mademoiselle Fourcas, and bringing her out. She is very fond of her, and wishes to marry her to some one worthy of her. I hope that she will succeed, and I don't wish to detract from her merit. She will prove her disinterestedness by remaining here to-night when all the other ladies will have left their maids to sell in their place."

All these sarcastic as well as pleasant remarks were made in a tone of voice which finally quieted Savinien's anxiety. M. Montauron would not have jested like this, thought he, if he were about to effect some conjugal stroke, but what could be the "surprise" he meditated ?

On drawing near to the kiosk, Savinien did not see Mademoiselle Fourcas, so numerous were the purchasers about the counter, but he saw Madame Montauron, who stood with her back towards him, hiding in this way some person to whom she was speaking, and who had passed behind the counter.

At this moment a man whom the viscount had not observed, although he stood near by facing him, stepped out of a group of people, and came towards Savinien and the banker.

"Here is my 'surprise,'" said the banker, laughing.

"My uncle !" cried Savinien.

"Himself !" cried M. de Trémorin.

"That is not all," muttered M. Montauron, smiling, and watching the warmth with which the uncle and nephew greeted one another, while he stood aside.

"You in Paris, and without letting me know !" exclaimed Savinien, reproachfully.

"You would have known it this morning," replied M. de Trémorin, "had you not moved away from the hotel without writing to me anything about it."

"Did you go to the Rue du Helder hotel ?"

"Of course I did. Where else should I go ? I have not any rooms in the Rue Rembrandt."

"So you know that I have ?"

"I know fine things about you, and I am not sorry that I came here. It was high time I did, for it seems that you have been going on at a high rate since you left Plouër. Is it with your letter-of-credit that you spend twenty thousand francs in rooms ?"

"No, certainly not, my dear uncle, but I will explain to you."

"No matter ! Montauron has told me enough, and I am not in the humour to scold you just now. Some one else will do that presently. Come with me and thank your landlord who has given you good advice, although he was wrong to let you such expensive rooms. But I'm sure that you have never followed his advice whatever it was."

All this was said in a hearty and affectionate tone, which would have

reassured Savinien, even had he not known the character of the excellent man who had been a father to him from his childhood upwards.

Baron de Trémorin was a solidly built native of Brittany, about fifty years old. His beard, which he wore unshorn, had but slightly turned greyish, and, although he was not dressed in conformity with the latest fashions, he had an air of distinction. His face was expressive of goodness above everything else, tempered, however, by a certain roughness of manner which did not trouble his nephew at all.

"Montauron!" exclaimed the baron, "come here and see how Monsieur d'Amaulis, the last of his race, looks since he has seen me! I have a great mind to carry him off with me, to lecture him at my ease."

"My wife will never forgive you if you deprive her of his company and your own also, my dear baron," replied the banker.

"The fact is that I have scarcely said two words to Madame Montauron. I had not been talking to her more than ten minutes when I saw you dragging my nephew along with you."

"She was very happy to see you again."

"So happy that she almost fainted away when you brought me up to her. It must be allowed, however, that she did not expect me, and that shows, my dear friend, how discreet you are. I requested you not to reveal that I was coming, so as to surprise this bad fellow Savinien. You thought that I included everybody. So I must apologise to your wife for startling her so much. Let us go back to her."

Savinien was no longer afraid, but felt somewhat taken aback, and already thought of the change which the unforeseen arrival of M. de Trémorin would cause in his relations with Madame Montauron. He was not allowed time for reflection, however. His uncle drew him on towards the kiosk. The banker preceded them, and led them through the side-entrance.

"Savinien!" cried a silvery voice. And at the same moment Savinien beheld before him his cousin Yvonne, who threw her arms around his neck and kissed him upon both cheeks.

The tableau thus afforded was perfect. Savinien's uncle was laughing heartily. M. Montauron looked delighted, his wife was controlling her emotion, which almost displayed itself by tears. Yvonne seemed ashamed of having yielded to her first impulse, and Savinien himself was covered with confusion, and scarcely dared to raise his eyes.

At a short distance from them, pale and trembling, Julia Fourcas looked on without remembering to serve a fine gentleman who wanted to buy some cigars. She had just discovered that she had a rival, and realised that Viscount d'Amaulis would never become her husband.

V

ON the day after the fair given for the home for destitute girls in the park attached to the Montauron mansion, at an hour when all the fair saleswomen were still asleep, Baron de Trémorin, his daughter, and his nephew were finishing their breakfast at the Lion d'Or, an annex to the hotel where the owner of the Manor of Plouër had put up, and where Savinien's adventures had commenced five weeks previously. The repast, although an early one, had been most substantial. The baron was a hearty eater and drinker.

Since they had sat down M. de Trémorin had joked away continually, without saying one word respecting his nephew's conduct during his sojourn in Paris. Savinien did not know what to think, as he had expected a long lecture and a severe questioning. On the evening before, after the meeting at the kiosk, his uncle had bidden him good evening, but had told him to come on the following morning to the restaurant annexed to the Rue du Helder hotel, where they now found themselves. M. Montauron, having invited the uncle and niece to dinner—a rapid dinner, without ceremony, which would admit of his wife's return to the fair in the evening—there was nothing for Savinien to do but go off.

He did not need to be urged to do so, for his position as regarded his cousin and Mademoiselle Fourcas would have been very embarrassing, and besides, he needed to be alone to think of the decisive venture he was about to make, and how he could assure its success, for M. de Trémorin's arrival from Brittany did not free him from his promise to bring matters to an issue with Count Aparanda.

Since he had seen Yvonne again he felt himself fortified against the temptations of Paris, and did not in the least regret having left a free field to Adhémar de Laffemas as regards the heiress. Yvonne, the pretty creature, with her big blue eyes, her rosy cheeks slightly tanned by the open air, her light brown hair falling in delicate ringlets upon her snowy forehead, was so very lovely, and appeared so happy to see her cousin again, and made so little mystery in hiding her innocent love—easily to be read in her limpid gaze—that Savinien felt as though his entire youth had risen before him again and he experienced its charm anew. He saw himself once more running across the moors covered with the heather-bloom of spring, gathering furze-blossoms of the tint of amethysts, and rushes golden like the sun.

The remembrance came to him of dreams of a cloudless future, the happiness of the wise who know how to be satisfied with their own lot. Mademoiselle Fourcas' millions offered him no such temptation, and her dazzling type of beauty did not for him possess the charm, the pathetic grace of that of Yvonne de Trémorin. He thought that it depended only upon himself to make her Viscountess d'Amaulis. At least he hoped so. He believed M. de Trémorin entertained the same views regarding him as when he had set out for Paris. A returning Crusader, he dreamed of his marriage as a reward for his prowess on the battle-field of Parisian temptation, for he did not consider himself to have been otherwise than brave.

Coffee was now brought in, and Yvonne entertained herself by picking out the best cigars from a box brought in for her father to choose from.

"My lad," said M. de Trémorin, suddenly, "you lost a fine sight last night. If you had returned to the fair you would have seen your cousin sell a hundred and fifty boxes of cigars worth a penny each, at the rate of two hundred francs each. There was one gentleman who paid twenty-five louis for his box."

"What!" exclaimed Savinien. "Yvonne, too?"

"What do you mean by 'Yvonne, too?' Are you surprised that she should be a success?"

"Not at all, uncle! But I should never have believed that she would have the courage to sell cigars to all those men who hung round the counter at the kiosk."

"Oh, I was very much frightened," said the young girl. "If Madame Montauron hadn't encouraged and helped me I think that I should have

run away. But I had to fill the place of the beautiful young lady who had been taking so much trouble for the sake of the poor. They must have lost a good deal by her going away, but I did the best I could."

"I did not know that she went away," said Savinien.

"Ten minutes after you left, cousin, she went away as well. She said she felt tired, so Monsieur Montauron went in search of her guardian, and he took her home. I was very tired also, for we spent the night in the train and I did not sleep two hours at the hotel, but I couldn't refuse to help Madame Montauron. She is so kind, so gentle! I never saw her before, but it seemed to me as though I had known her for a dozen years and loved her. If you knew how she spoke of you, Savinien, you would feel very much flattered."

"Yvonne, don't say another word! You would make a perfect coxcomb of Viscount d'Amaulis, who is only too greatly disposed to be one since he became a Parisian. Besides, you exaggerate. Madame Montauron only said he was not bad-looking, and seemed like a good sort of fellow," said M. de Trémorin.

"That is much more than I deserve, my dear uncle. I am convinced that if Madame Montauron thinks well of me it is because I am your nephew. It is the remembrance she has preserved of you which makes her welcome me as she does."

"That proves that she is a woman of good feeling, which I have never doubted."

"She is very happy, is she not?" asked Yvonne.

"Undoubtedly. Why do you ask that?"

"Because she is very sad sometimes. Yesterday, after the fair, when we left her she had tears in her eyes."

"You must have imagined that. Besides, the sorrows of grown women don't concern young girls," said M. de Trémorin. "Go and dress yourself to go out and visit our relations in the Faubourg Saint-Germain."

"There's plenty of time, father, as it is only noon now."

"Tut! tut! there's Jeannette looking for you now, and you will have plenty to do while I go out to attend to business matters. Besides, I want to talk to Savinien alone. Run back to your room."

"So soon!"

"What are you complaining of? There will be heaps of dresses and bonnets brought here for you to try on, for I want you to look well. Your cousin, Madame de Loudinières whom we are going to see, wants to find a husband for you in Paris."

"Not without my consent, I hope," said Savinien.

Yvonne, somewhat confused, went off to find her maid, a Breton girl, and the uncle and the nephew found themselves alone for the first time since they had met at the fair.

"Now let us talk, viscount," said M. de Trémorin, seating himself, as though he were going to take a ride, across a square-backed chair which looked as though it had been made expressly for a nobleman of the Middle Ages.

"How you speak, uncle!" said Savinien, although he knew very well that the baron did not assume the majestic expression he now wore when he meant to lecture him seriously.

"I speak in a tone suitable to the manner in which you have been conducting yourself. Be sure that you are now standing before a judge, and that you are on trial."

"To hear you, uncle, one would think that I had been guilty of some crime."

"Crime? No, but great and foolish mistakes, which is perhaps worse, as Talleyrand said of the assassination of the Duke d'Enghien."

"I confess that I was wrong to leave the hotel without letting you know, but I demand the right to set forth extenuating circumstances."

"Plead, my lad, plead! But I am not the sort of man who is put on a jury to be bamboozled by a lawyer's talk."

"Oh! I am not relying upon my eloquence to convince you; but you will permit me to remind you of the instructions which you gave me when I left you at Plouër."

"I should like to know how you will undertake to show that I told you to begin by ruinous folly."

"You told me to live for six months like a thorough Parisian."

"And you straightway discovered that thorough Parisians do not live at hotels? I might dispute that, as I know some who prefer doing so. But I will grant you that men who live in style prefer expensive rooms. That is no reason, however, for hiring rooms at three thousand francs' rent, and buying twenty thousand francs' worth of furniture."

"Thirteen thousand, uncle! I got it at a bargain."

"Yes, I know all about the bargains at the Hôtel des Ventes. If you had to sell the goods again you would not get six thousand francs for them. Then you forget the upholsterer's bill. I maintain my figure of twenty thousand francs. Do you know, nephew, how much your land at Trivagon, the only bit of land that your father left you, is worth a year?"

"Yes, uncle. My income isn't more than six thousand francs."

"Well, the land is not worth more than a hundred and twenty-four thousand. Supposing you sold what your father left you—which, at the rate at which you are going on cannot fail to happen soon—and invested your money at five per cent, which is not very easy, you would have nine thousand francs income."

"That is correct."

"Well, out of that amount you have spending one thousand per month. If you go on like this, in January you won't have a copper to receive. Utter ruin will be your New-Year's gift, my handsome nephew!"

"You are quite mistaken, uncle, for I am going back to Plouër."

"When are you going, if you please?"

"When you do, uncle, if you have no objections."

"That is an indefinite date, as you don't know whether I shall stay in Paris two weeks or a year."

"I hope that you will not stay here long!"

"You are very anxious, then, to return to Brittany?"

"I wish I were there now! I should have returned there a week ago if I had not been detained here."

"By whom and by what, pray? But I won't ask you, my lad. Still you will confess that if you really thought of going back, you are still more inexcusable in having gone to such expense respecting your rooms. As you say that you are tired of Paris, why did you do that?"

"If you knew, uncle, how it happened! I had almost nothing to do with it."

"Bah! you won't undertake to tell me that any one forced you to leave this good old hotel, where I have put up for the last thirty years

and where a man can be perfectly at home, and where I and mine are especially so?"

"I was very well satisfied; but supposing I told you that it was Monsieur Montauron himself who advised me to take these rooms?"

"In one of his houses? Well, he acted as landlords do who have houses to let. But you were free to refuse."

"Yes, but he insisted."

"You surprise me! I didn't think that he cared so much about letting his rooms."

"He very graciously spoke of the advantage he would derive from my being near his house. He told me that he could then call upon me in a neighbourly way, and he did so."

"You have not been often to call upon him. He has scarcely seen you for two weeks, so he told me. But let that pass. You got your furniture to please this rich banker, who does not know whether you are better than a beggar or not; but will you be good enough to tell me where you got the money to buy that magnificent furniture?" Then, as Savinien reddened, his uncle added, mildly:

"You had a credit of six thousand francs, and I know that you have exhausted it, or nearly so. But that wouldn't have sufficed, for you have lived five weeks, and one cannot live in Paris on nothing. You must have paid for a part of your furniture, then, and run in debt for the rest of it."

The nephew made no haste to reply, and his embarrassment showed what it cost him to state the facts; but he replied at last, having a horror of falsehood: "I don't wish to conceal anything from you, my dear uncle, and I will tell you at once that by the strangest of chances I became possessed of a very large sum on the morrow of my arrival."

"By gambling?"

"No; by speculating at the Bourse."

"The deuce! I should have preferred that you had won it at cards. The Amaulis family have never speculated. How did you run into the brokers' set, and how did they give you credit? Tell me all about it, Savinien."

"You remember George Fougeray, one of my comrades at the law school at Rennes?"

"Yes. I invited him to dine with me whenever I went there to see you. He was a very intelligent lad—too smart, perhaps."

"Yes, indeed, uncle. He has applied his intelligence to getting rich, and has succeeded—half-way. He is engaged in speculation, and I think that he does not sufficiently reflect about the way in which he makes his money. Thus it was that one day he took me to the Bourse, as though to see a curious sight."

Savinien now gave his uncle a full account of the operation by which he had made the large amount of a hundred thousand francs, as well as of his unwillingness to receive it, stating how he had finally done so; but M. de Trémorin, instead of showing surprise, now quietly informed him that Montauron had already told him all about the matter, and that he was delighted to find that Savinien had no disposition to deceive him. Then, after advising his nephew to refrain from further speculations at any future time, he startled him by quietly advising him to aim at a rich marriage, a marriage with an heiress having millions of money. "Don't attempt to impose upon me!" exclaimed M. de Trémorin, as Savinien

protested. "You spend twenty thousand francs in a month, and you turn up your nose at a fortune. It is truly incredible!"

The confession of the losses at baccarat followed Savinien's assurance that he did not wish to marry an heiress, but only hoped to return to Brittany, which he now again repeated.

M. de Trémorin thereupon declared that there were hundreds of clubs in Paris which were no better than gambling-dens with an outward show of respectability, and that after being robbed at the Plungers' Club, Savinien was utterly in error if he supposed that he would be admitted to the Jockey, which was no place for a man of so small a fortune. It came out in the avowal of all that had occurred, that Savinien had lost his money at Anita's residence, and this he did not attempt to conceal. M. de Trémorin thereupon made various comments upon the scene which, so he had been told, had been occasioned by this woman at the charity fair, and ended by assuring Savinien that he was admirably fitted for Parisian life, and that after returning to Plouër he would at once discover that he could not live any other life than the riotous one which he had lately been indulging in. While praising Savinien for the frankness of his avowals, the baron still insisted upon this view of his nephew's disposition and character, and declared that resolutions at his age were not worth a straw, and that young men did not know what they really wanted.

"You are made for a position in what is called 'high-life,' and not for a 'gentleman-farmer's' life, which would never suit you. You are like a schoolboy who has just smoked his first cigar, you feel a little sick of it just now; but if you get over that—as you will—you will immediately want to smoke another. I return, therefore, to what I said before: you must marry a rich woman."

"In Paris, uncle?"

"You will not find one in Brittany. Heiresses are rare with us, and girls have small dowries."

"I don't care for the dowry."

"You are wrong there. A man is nothing in Paris unless he begins housekeeping with a hundred thousand francs income, at least."

"I don't care to be anything, then."

"That kind of talk is all very well in Béranger's songs, but real life is a different thing, my lad," was M. de Trémorin's retort. "I maintain that you would find it delightful to have a town-house, carriages, a box at the opera, a stable full of race-horses, and to be triumphantly voted in at the Jockey Club, at which you would be rejected if you remain as poor in pocket as you now are. I maintain that, after tasting of the exciting life which you have been offered in Paris, you wouldn't be able to settle down to the monotony of existence such as it would be with an old man like myself. You would die of boredom, and you would make us all uncomfortable. Your aunt, your cousin, and I find our life very happy, but you no longer belong to it."

"You drive me away, then!" said Savinien, very much grieved.

"Not at all. I only wish to spare you useless regret. You will always be welcome at Plouër, but I don't think that you are suited to a continued life there. Besides, it is time for me to free you from my guardianship. I have consented to take charge of your property until now, because you begged me to do so, and because I did not think you capable of taking good care of it yourself, as you are not acquainted with the proper manner of managing land and money matters. But this kind of partnership cannot

continue. You are of age, and have been so for three years already, and if you can't manage your own affairs now you will never learn to do so. I conclude that the time has come for you to begin doing so, and so I will hand you my accounts."

"But, my dear uncle, I don't ask you to do that," pleaded Savinien.

"I know that, but I insist upon handing your fortune over to you. Your affairs haven't suffered by my management of them, but it is not proper that I should continue directing them. You are no longer a boy, and if it were known that you still had need of a guardian, it might stand in the way of your marrying."

"I shall never marry any but a woman who knows us both."

"I certainly think that the woman whom you can marry if you like knows all about *you*."

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Bless me! of the only one who is suited to you, and who is disposed to accept you on your own merits."

"Yvonne!" exclaimed Savinien.

"Yvonne? Oh, no! I am not alluding to her," said M. de Trémorin, coldly. "I am speaking of Mademoiselle Julia Fourcas, the orphan with five millions' dowry, a charming girl whom I saw yesterday, and who, according to Madame Montauron, is very much in love with you. It appears that you can obtain her hand in marriage by simply asking for it. Her uncle Fourcas is, I hear, very desirous that she should have a husband with a title, and he would willingly consent to let his niece become the wife of Viscount d'Amaulis. A month ago I should probably not have advised this marriage, which many people of our own rank would call a *mésalliance*, but now I warmly desire it for your own sake, for it will give you the wealth which has become indispensable to you."

"Mademoiselle Fourcas' millions are nothing to me," said the viscount. "If she had twenty instead of five, it would be all the same thing. I do not love her."

"You would, after a while."

"No, I shouldn't, because, as you very well know, I love another woman."

Baron de Trémorin looked grave, and after a moment replied: "I am glad, Savinien, to have this opportunity of speaking once for all, and clearly and decisively, of your sentiments towards my daughter and your engagement to her, if such it can now be called."

"I repeat," said Savinien, firmly, "that she is the object and the only object of my affections."

"I have so supposed."

"You must have known it very well."

"I was by no means sure of it, and I came to no positive conclusion on the matter. I wished to study your character, and to see you put to the proof before making up my mind. You are aware that it was for that reason I sent you to Paris."

"I suppose that if you took the trouble to do that it was because you thought me not unworthy of marrying my cousin."

"Unworthy! How can an Amaulis be 'unworthy?' On the contrary, I consider you quite good enough for a duchess. There is no 'unworthiness' in the question, which is only whether you are suited to Yvonne and she to you."

"I think that if you asked her that question——"

"I shall do no such thing," interrupted the baron, "She cannot be at the same time judge and plaintiff. I don't say that she does not fancy you, but it is my duty as her father to see whether the match would make her happy. I have been thinking of nothing else for years."

"And you have finally made up your mind to turn me off? What have I done to deserve such treatment?" exclaimed Savinien, in a tone of great excitement.

"Do not excite yourself, pray," said M. de Tremorin, "and let me tell you my reasons. You were brought up with Yvonne, and spent your boyhood with her as you might have done with a sister, had you had one. I thought that I was right in keeping you at Plouër. I was wrong. I do not regret bringing you up like my own son, nor need I tell you that I shall always treat you as such. But I ought to have foreseen what has come to pass. I ought to have guessed that you would become attached to Yvonne and she to you; that you might, notwithstanding, be unsuited to each other—for these early attachments often amount to nothing—and that a time would come when you would both of you find yourselves in a false position, and would tardily discover that you were both mistaken as to your mutual feelings."

"That time has not come, and never will come," said Savinien, energetically.

"How do you know that? I knew very well what I was about when I sent you away to a law-school for three years. I admit that you returned as much in love with your cousin as when you left——"

"A hundred times more in love, uncle."

"I grant you that, if you like; but Yvonne could not yet know whether her own attachment for you was not a transient one. I was not altogether sure as to you. I knew that your natural impulses were good, but you were all untried. I do not even know how Yvonne may feel, when she has seen something of the world. You see that I am almost brutally frank, but you are too intelligent to bear any grudge against me for my candour."

"I thank you for it, on the contrary, and for having given me the opportunity to prove that my heart will never change," said the viscount.

"You must admit, however," resumed his uncle, "that you have become quite another man during the short time that you have been in Paris. You will reply that it is your ardent wish to return to Plouër, but to that I am obliged to respond, that if you do, you will return alone, as it is my intention to spend the summer at Dieppe or Trouville, and to remain during next winter in Paris. Your aunt knows my plans, and will join me in the autumn."

"Your plans?" stammered Savinien.

"I make no mystery about them. It is my intention to introduce Yvonne into society here. She is a beautiful girl, and our relations in the Faubourg Saint-Germain will open us the doors of all desirable houses where a young lady of good family may find a suitable match. Don't protest, for I shall leave her free to choose. I don't take your name off the list of suitors, but I shall not allow her to marry for a full year yet, when she will have seen something of society."

"Has she consented to this?"

"My daughter is too well brought up to oppose her father's wishes. It is my duty to marry her suitably. She will not be poor, as she is my only child, and our income is thirty thousand francs a year; but she will not have a large dowry, and, while I am upon this subject, let me tell you that

certain reports as to the extent of my fortune are erroneous. There are persons who have set afoot a story to the effect that I am one of the largest shareholders in the Provincial Bank. This is not the case. Montauron does very well with my funds, but they are not so considerable. My daughter will have no 'millions,' unless through an unexpected alliance."

"She certainly will not have millions through marriage with me," muttered Savinien.

"That is true," replied M. de Trémorin smiling, "but I admit that wealth isn't happiness, although it contributes to it. All depends upon the disposition of the wife. Some women cannot be happy without riches, others care more for affection. As regards Yvonne, what may make her happy is yet to be known, and when she sees others than yourself her very love may change. This remains to be seen. For your own part, I maintain, as I said before, that the millions belonging to Mademoiselle Fourcas, or some other heiress, would be a fine thing for you to have."

"I give you my word of honour that unless I marry Yvonne I shall never marry at all," said Savinien.

"You may yet marry her, or you may remain single, as you say. This will be decided next winter. I wished to clear up matters, to tell you my plans, and inform you of the exact state of my fortune. Yvonne will have more money than you possess, and—although I don't think it any too much even with the addition of your own property—I shall not make that a reason for opposing your marriage if both of you continue to feel as you now do. But not a word more of your marriage for an entire year from now! Let us speak of the Montauron family, as we are on the subject of marriage, and its disadvantages in some cases. You know that Mademoiselle Aurélie de Louvigné had no money of her own when she accepted Montauron, who was already a rich man and has become much richer."

"Yes, and I also know that it was you who brought about the match, in spite of the inequality of fortune."

"When there is inequality it is much better that the wealth should be on the side of the man. Aurélie was an orphan, and she hadn't, like you—if I may pay myself that compliment—the advantage of having an uncle. Her cousin who had charge of her, only thought of bringing her out in the fashionable world, and was the cause of getting her into trouble, which led me to intervene in the matter and arrange a marriage for her, as I thought it my duty to do, for she was the daughter of one of my most intimate friends. The trouble which arose was not, however, of a serious character, and Montauron, whom I had some business connection with at the time, fell deeply in love with Aurélie, over whom, in view of counteracting Madame de Morvieux's recklessness, I succeeded in exercising a certain amount of watchfulness. I backed up Montauron's offer in the warmest manner, and I induced Mademoiselle de Louvigné to marry him, there being no serious reason why she should not do so."

As uncle Trémorin said these words, Savinien gave a sigh of relief. It was evident to him that his uncle was not acquainted with the actual facts. This statement did not coincide with that of Madame Montauron; however, Savinien believed that his uncle was stating the truth, as far as he knew it.

"The Montaurons are very happy, I flatter myself," added his uncle, "and I ought to congratulate myself, ought I not, on having made the match?"

"How can they be otherwise," replied Savinien, with pardonable bitterness, "as they possess the 'millions' about which you have had so much to say this morning?"

"Your answer is only fair," replied the baron, laughing, "but give me a positive reply. I ask you the question, as you have had the opportunity of judging. I have seen little of the pair for years, for although I have kept up business relations with Montauron, I have not written regularly to his wife, and yesterday I had scarcely an opportunity to say a word to her. Tell me all about them. I insist upon your doing so, for Aurélie appeared to me to be sad and anxious. I intend to find out the reason of this when I see her again, if possible, but, meantime, you can, perhaps, give me a hint as to what it is that is troubling her."

Savinien started and changed colour at this direct attack. He was not prepared for it, but he felt that, without compromising Madame Montauron he must still make some suitable reply. "I don't know," said he, hesitatingly. "She was, perhaps, greatly annoyed by the preposterous scene which a woman made at the kiosk just before you came thore."

"Very possibly. It seems that it was a scandalous affair, and calculated to affect her very unpleasantly. Montauron gave me some little notion of what had occurred. What was it, exactly? Didn't an impudent sort of woman come to the kiosk with some man or other?"

"There was something of that sort."

"I was going to ask Montauron if he knew who the man was, but his wife changed the subject at that moment and I did not wish to annoy her by insisting. It even seemed to me that she did not wish to have anything said on the matter before her about the individual who was with the girl. You saw him, as you were there. You must know who he is."

"He is a foreigner, I believe?"

"That doesn't surprise me. Foreigners often do outrageous things. This man may know how to behave himself in his own country, although he chooses to act like a blackguard in ours. That is just what people get for making these foreigners so welcome, as Parisians are in the habit of doing. What country does this man come from? Is he a Prussian?"

"No, a Swede," replied Savinien, unguardedly.

"A Swede!" exclaimed M. de Trémorin, frowning. "What is his name?"

"Let me think," replied Savinien, pretending to have forgotten. "Why do you want to know?" he added at last as carelessly as he could.

"I have my reasons."

"Monsieur Montauron will tell you his name."

"Does Monsieur Montauron know this man, then?"

"I believe so."

"But yourself you saw him. What age is he? Is he a man with a full black beard, an aquiline nose, and a very marked cast of countenance? Is he between thirty-five and forty? Has he very bright black eyes, and does he remind one of Fra Diavolo?"

"You must know him, uncle, since you describe him so perfectly."

"Try to remember if he does not call himself Count Aparanda."

"That is the name," replied Savinien, after again pretending to try and recollect it.

"I understand now why Madame Montauron looked anxious," said Baron de Trémorin as though talking to himself. Then suddenly turning to his nephew, and giving him a searching glance, he added: "Savinien,

I saw that you hesitated just now about answering the questions I put to you. It is quite proper to be discreet with regard to any matter in which a woman is concerned even indirectly. Count Aparanda behaved yesterday in a manner which was all the more deserving of blame from the fact that he was formerly acquainted with the lady whom he insulted by bringing a worthless woman to the fair. You have been skilful enough to find this out, I see, and you did well to keep it from me, as you naturally supposed that I was ignorant of this Swede's very existence. But it seems that you know him, and I now beg of you to tell me all that you know concerning him."

"I know very little, uncle. He is living here at an expensive rate, plays high, and always wins."

"I'll venture to say that you have played cards with him."

"I am not the only one. He has drained the pockets of all my friends."

"How long has he been in Paris?"

"Only a few weeks."

"Where did you meet him?"

"At a club where George Fougeray had me elected without consulting me, and at the house of the woman whom he had the audacity to bring to the charity-fair. However, after I paid him what I lost to him at cards, I saw no more of him. I do not even bow to him."

"That is the correct line of conduct," said M. de Trémorin. "However, to the point. The time has come for me to give you my reasons for telling you why I wished to know everything about this man, and how he might have behaved towards Aurélie. I told you just now that before marrying Montauron, who is a most worthy man, Mademoiselle de Louvigné was so carelessly cared for by her cousin, Madame de Morvieux, that trouble arose from that relative's negligence. If Aurélie was suitably married, she has me to thank for it, for the crazy-headed old woman who had charge of her did nothing but compromise her."

Savinien mutely wondered how far his uncle's confidential communications would go, and what was the true extent of his knowledge respecting this delicate affair.

"She took Aurélie," continued uncle Trémorin, "into cosmopolitan society which, to her, was delightful, for she had been very fond of pleasure when young, and still retained the same tastes. This society was a kind of gilded and elegant 'Bohemia' of all nations, in which there were numbers of people who for a time made a vast show, but who often vanished from Paris, leaving debts behind them. Like comets, they came and went."

"And their coming was a bad omen," remarked Savinien.

"True. But to return to Aurélie. You see that at thirty-three Madame Montauron is still handsome. Now, ten years ago she was admirably beautiful. I have never seen any woman in my life so perfectly lovely. She had rare intelligence and an excellent heart. She was, in a word, a perfect creature, and you can easily believe that she did not lack admirers when she made her appearance in society. She had little or no fortune, as I told you before; but being of so noble a family, I had every reason to think that she would make a very desirable marriage. Unfortunately, I was not living in Paris at the time, and was detained at Plouër by interests of all sorts, so that I could not watch over my old friend's daughter. In the hands of her cousin, the dowager, she ended by falling into a veritable wasp's nest. The so-called 'distinguished' foreigners

who surrounded her kept off men of serious intentions, and one of these birds of ill-omen made the fiercest love to her."

"Was it this Swede?" asked the viscount, although he already knew so well.

"Yes," replied M. de Trémorin, "and what is worse, she fell in love with him. How Mademoiselle de Louvigné can have been pleased with this northern Mephistopheles must ever remain a mystery. I have never been able to understand it, and she has never been able to account for her own feelings towards him. I am forced to believe that it was a kind of spell which this comic-opera brigand exercised over her. He has an air which sentimentalists call 'fatal,' and of which even intelligent women sometimes feel the charm. The matter went on, however, and when Aurélie's feather-headed cousin cried 'Fire!' the house was already half burned down. In other words, when she made up her mind to let me know what was going on, the Swede had made a plot to run off with Aurélie, and she was being very much talked about. I at once came to Paris, and I did my best to repair the mischief, which most fortunately was not irreparable. There had been a talk, but no open scandal, and these things sometimes occur without important consequences in Parisian life. My first thought was to call upon the Scandinavian to repair his light conduct by marrying Mademoiselle de Louvigné. He had a great deal of money, from which circumstance I concluded that he was a man of established wealth. I thought, therefore, that Aurélie might do a worse thing than marry him, under the circumstances. I went to Count Aparanda, and put the matter plainly to him."

"He knows you, then?"

"Perfectly well, and I'll wager that, had he seen me near the kiosk when he was playing the bully, he would have vanished in the twinkling of an eye, for he does not care to be where I am."

"I presume that you treated him rather roughly in former times?" insinuated Savinien, who was bent upon thoroughly pumping his uncle.

"I treated him as he deserved! Would you believe it, that this fellow, after trying various pretexts as an excuse for not marrying Aurélie, ended by confessing that he had a wife in his own country?"

"The miserable scoundrel!"

"I applied that flattering epithet to him myself on that occasion, and added others equally complimentary, but I then made a discovery which influenced my feelings in the matter; I discovered that this man, whose attentions had compromised Aurélie so seriously for the time being, was an absolute coward."

"I, also, have found that out."

"Have you, indeed? Then you have had dealings with him yourself?" exclaimed the baron, somewhat startled.

"Yes, on account of his rudeness one day in the Bois de Boulogne. I was riding with my cousin Adhémar and talking with Mademoiselle Fourcas, whom we had met, and who was also riding, when this man passed by with the same woman whom he brought with him to the fair. He bowed to me and I turned away my head—"

"I see! he submitted to your cutting him dead."

"Worse than that! He informed me that he was going to send his seconds to me, but they have never been sent."

"Of course not! I tell you that he is the most paltry coward in existence. But to resume: I satisfied myself that he was indeed a married

man. I could not, therefore, compel him to marry Aurélie, but I did not, for all that, give up my resolution to save her. I questioned her closely, and I believe that she told me frankly all there was to tell. The evil was not so great as it might have been. She had saved herself in time."

Savinien again experienced a feeling of satisfaction; for, as he had always supposed, it was evident that M. de Trémorin had not wantonly deceived an honourable man by leading him to marry a young girl who had lost her virtue. He had, it seemed, believed Aurélie to have been imprudent—but not guilty. Again, Savinien thought how differently Madame Montauron had told her story to him in order to lead him to lend her his help in the desperate position in which she had found herself in connection both with her husband and with Aparanda.

"I took energetic measures," resumed the baron. "I induced Madame de Morvieux to take a trip to Italy with Mademoiselle de Louvigné. In Paris everything is soon forgotten, and a long absence was the best remedy to apply to such a case. Besides, I signified to this cowardly miscreant that he must leave France under penalty of a public chastisement, and that if he ever undertook to set eyes again on the imprudent girl whom he had injured, I would deal with him unsparingly. At this, much alarmed, the valiant knight decamped without demur, and I heard no more of him. Aurélie remained an entire year on the other side of the Alps, and when she returned home her acquaintance with him had been forgotten. I obliged her cousin to reside outside Paris, and she took up her abode in the environs for a time. They lived at Ville d'Avray, and it was there that I took Monsieur Montauron to see them. He had seen Aurélie a number of times before she had left Paris, and had fallen desperately in love with her, although he was not personally acquainted with her. He knew, however, that I was a friend of the family, and he begged me to give him a regular introduction. I, knowing what an excellent man he was, and how desirable a husband, no less on account of his moral worth than on that of his wealth, did not refuse. I need not tell you that I took good care to tell him that Mademoiselle de Louvigné had already loved, but that, finding her affection to be ill bestowed, she had fled from the man in question, and had returned to France with her heart healed. Montauron had heard something of the affair, and had, I believe, made some inquiries about it. He thanked me for my frankness, and assured me that he did not consider Mademoiselle de Louvigné responsible for the impertinence of a foreigner, who had seen fit to boast of her love, when, in reality, she had only a little giddiness to reproach herself with. I have always supposed that he spoke about all this to Aurélie herself, and that they came to a clear understanding concerning it. In a word, they married, and although they had no children at all, instead of having, as fairy tales set forth, 'a great many,' at all events they were happy. I mean that they have been so until now, as far as I can judge, for I have seen Montauron only at rare intervals, and have never seen his wife during the twelve years which have elapsed since their marriage. Am I wrong? Is the peace of the household now threatened? I begin to fear that it is so, since this man Aparanda has reappeared. I must find out all about this matter, and you must help me to do so."

"I!"

"Yes, you. You know the scoundrel who may bring trouble into my friend's happy home. You must know where he lives, or can find out."

"I believe that he lives at the Grand Hôtel."

"I will find him, then, and compel him to leave Paris within twenty-four hours. He will obey me, I'll answer for it, and Madame Montauron will be grateful to me for ridding her of this detestable ghost, who has arisen, as it were, from the grave of the past."

This declaration of war against the Swede greatly troubled Viscount d'Amaulis. He had his plan for a campaign which did not agree with his uncle's, and the interference of M. de Trémorin was premature and inopportune. He even feared that it would lead to a catastrophe. Abruptly attacked by this old antagonist, Count Aparanda was quite capable of disappearing for good without restoring the child. His disappearance would curtail all negotiations, and plunge Madame Montauron into the depths of despair.

It would have been easy to have led the baron to abandon a plan which he had made *ex abrupto*. His nephew need only have told him all he knew concerning the banker's wife. The baron, fully informed, would then renounce his warlike intentions, no doubt. But how could Savinien reveal him the truth which he was so utterly ignorant of, as he had not the slightest knowledge of the existence of any daughter, the offspring of the culpable weakness of Aurélie de Louvigné? Had he possessed such knowledge he could never have initiated the marriage of his friend's daughter with M. Montauron.

Besides, Savinien had no right to betray the secret confided to him by an unhappy and unfortunate woman, and to force her to blush before her father's friend. At all events he could reveal nothing without consulting Madame Montauron herself.

"Don't you think," said he, "that it would be better to see Madame Montauron before taking any steps whatever, especially aggressive ones?"

"Why should I do so?" replied M. de Trémorin. "It is evident that I should be rendering her a great service by freeing her from this scamp. Since his return she must be in mortal anguish. She would thank me for sending him out of the way."

"I do not doubt that, but I think that Madame Montauron particularly dreads a scandal which might injure her reputation and destroy her peace of mind. This man seems to have come to Paris with hostile intentions. His appearance at the charity fair was a premeditated insult. He showed himself there with a bold and defiant woman in order to warn Madame Montauron that he would neglect no opportunity of being obnoxious to her, or of injuring her."

"With what motive?"

"Because of his wicked nature, in the first place, and secondly, he perhaps means to try to extort money from her; for, although he has won coin at cards, he is said to be, in point of fact, a ruined man. It is, therefore, better not to urge him to extremities, as the result could only be his avenging himself upon Madame Montauron."

"What harm can he do her, after all? His former attentions to her are an old story now, and if he should relate it, even if he cried it through the streets, no one would listen to him. During these twelve years Madame Montauron has never given any cause for scandal, while this Aparanda has become a complete adventurer. The game would not be an equal one, and the Swede won't care to play it."

"Openly, no; but he may make use of such means as such men use.

He may spread outrageous reports or write anonymous letters to the husband, for instance."

"I had not thought of that."

"What would happen if this miserable wretch made Monsieur Montauron believe that his wife had been his mistress?"

"The first thing that would happen would be that Montauron would kill him."

"No; for Aparanda would certainly take good care not to sign any such denunciation. I admit that Monsieur Montauron might not believe it; but calumny always leaves a stain, and if Monsieur Montauron is at all inclined to be jealous——"

"Which he is, or was, I admit. He married Aurélie de Louvigné with all eagerness because he loved her, and because I endorsed her. Still, I think he has always felt a certain mistrust. Montauron is a peculiar sort of man, very frank, very upright, and, like all people who are absolutely wrapped up in business, it is necessary to his happiness that he should be perfectly secure as to his wife. He had faith in me and accepted the wife I offered him, a young girl whom he adored. She has never, that I know of, given him the smallest cause for suspicion, but if his suspicions should once be aroused, he would do anything whatever to clear up his doubts, because his very being would be at stake. No man could be director of the Provincial bank and at the same time mount guard over his wife."

"That is true; and don't you think, uncle, that if his peace was disturbed he would blame you for it?"

"That would be a most unjust thing for him to do!" exclaimed the baron, throwing away his almost finished cigar. "If he should take it into his head to revert to the share I had in bringing about his marriage, I would soon answer him. But between ourselves, I should greatly prefer to avoid all this, for I like the banker as much as I dislike the Swede. Still, I cannot sit with my arms crossed when this rascally foreigner is apparently threatening Aurélie de Louvigné, the daughter of a man who was my schoolmate and my most intimate friend! I must do something, the deuce take it!"

"I think as you do, uncle; but Madame Montauron is the person most interested in this matter, and I return to my first idea. It seems to me that before acting you would do right to consult her."

"Good! Here are you taking upon yourself to give me advice! The world must be upside down! But perhaps you are right, after all. I will see Aurélie and speak to her about it," said M. de Trémorin.

Savinien could scarcely conceal his satisfaction at this resolution on his uncle's part. It was not without a motive that he had endeavoured to bring about this determination. He thought that Madame Montauron would be much better protected by Baron de Trémorin than by Viscount d'Amaulis. The part of protector naturally reverted to his uncle, since the latter was responsible for the marriage, and he had a perfect right to hand the matter over to him. He hoped, besides, that this would lead to a full confession from Madame Montauron to M. de Trémorin, who could not then refuse to take the part of the unhappy victim of the dastardly Swede.

"How do you yourself get on with Madame Montauron?" suddenly asked the baron.

"She received me very cordially."

"But you only saw her before company, and she told you nothing of any domestic troubles?"

"It would have been very strange if she had." As Viscount d'Amaulis thus replied, he could not avoid remembering the many extraordinary events which had led to confidence being placed in him, although but twenty-four years old, when chance had thrown him in the way of the banker's wife.

"Now that we have talked fully of this matter," said the baron, "I will set you free, my dear nephew, till to-morrow."

"To-morrow is a long way off, my dear uncle."

"Bah! You can get on very well for twenty-four hours. I cannot take you to pay calls with Yvonne, because it would look as though I had accepted you as a son-in-law, which I have not yet done."

"You insist upon putting me to a further test, and I consent; but I have no doubt as to the result, so far as I am concerned."

"I have, however, if you haven't. But come to breakfast to-morrow. My time is all taken up to-day. Madame de Loudinières will undoubtedly keep us to dinner. I am just now going to the Provincial Bank, where I have a business appointment with Montauron, which I must attend to before I make my calls."

"Is it at his office?"

"Of course it is. Montauron doesn't habitually receive persons who have business with him in the courtyard. It will take us a full hour to go over our accounts. I so seldom come to Paris, that I must profit by this opportunity to find out how I stand in money matters. Montauron told me that we should not be disturbed this morning on any pretence whatever."

Savinien was already standing and about to take his leave. He promptly determined to profit by this opportunity to try and recover the casket; and he firmly hoped that M. Montauron, shut up with his uncle in the office on the first-floor, would not come to surprise him in the depths of the vaults below.

VI.

ALTHOUGH the office in which M. Bouret had received Viscount d'Amaulis when he first called at the Provincial Bank was richly furnished, it could not compare with the large and superbly furnished apartment occupied by the director when he wished to give an audience to any distinguished shareholders, or had occasion to preside over the meetings of the board of which he was the chairman. These occasions seldom occurred, however, and Montauron usually attended to the greater part of his business without leaving his own house.

However, for a fortnight past, he had changed his habits entirely. To the great annoyance of his lieutenant, who liked to play the part of commander-in-chief, Montauron now made his appearance every morning as soon as the bank opened, and did not go off till the shutters were put up.

He neglected all the great operations which are transacted between those standing high in the financial world, and was not seen on 'Change, or out of doors in the company of other bankers. He had not even made his appearance at the great fair till all the people in his employ had gone off,

and the bank had been closed for the day. Bouret himself could not understand his behaviour, and had received so abrupt an answer on speaking to him with reference to it, that he had no further desire to repeat his questions as to why it was that Montauron had suddenly become so close in his attention to business at the bank itself.

At about one o'clock that afternoon M. de Trémorin called. Montauron had given orders that he should not be disturbed, and was awaiting him in his office. They spent a long time in looking over accounts, and twenty minutes at least elapsed in the laborious examination of papers and books. The business came to an end at last, however; the baron was quick of comprehension, and had a good head for figures.

"I am delighted, my dear friend," said he, after a final verification, the result of which was entirely satisfactory. "I cannot thank you too heartily for having managed my capital so well, and it only remains for me to ask you to continue turning it to account."

"Until Mademoiselle de Trémorin's wedding-day," said M. Montauron, pleasantly.

"Even longer, my friend. Besides, we haven't come to that day yet. Meantime I rely upon your discretion, as heretofore; I don't wish that any one should know how much capital I own."

"You may be at ease on that point; a banker, like a physician, knows how to keep the secrets of his business."

"If you were questioned as to my financial situation, I would be greatly obliged to you if you would refer every one to my lawyer at Plouër."

"I understand. You wish that it should be believed that you own some land and nothing more."

"You understand the matter perfectly. My wishes apply to one and all. If, for instance, my nephew should question you, you can reply as you do to every one else."

"Oh, Monsieur d'Amaulis won't do so. He is far too well bred to ask questions."

"I think that he is so. But his stay in Paris has somewhat changed him. Since we are speaking of him, what do you think of his character, and what kind of a man do you fancy he will turn out to be?"

"You somewhat embarrass me. I don't know him well enough to say."

"You know that he has been doing some very foolish things here."

"They were very excusable, and have had no bad consequences. It was not a bad thing to make a hundred thousand francs on 'Change.'"

"Yes, it was, at the beginning of a young man's career. It needs no more to start him on a bad road. Besides, he lost that money at cards," said the baron.

"I was not aware of that," remarked the financier. "You surprise me greatly. I thought that he had given way to a passing temptation before, and would not play a second time."

"But he did so. He was made a member of some sort of gambling-den, called a club. He allowed himself to be taken to the house of a woman whose rooms are used for gambling purposes, and baccarat swept away all the money he had made by speculation."

"The mischief it did! That accounts for his exhausting his account here in a few days, after scarcely touching it at first."

"Savinien is a fine young man, but he is weak, and this defect may bring him into difficulty. I am anxious that he should marry and settle down."

"That is very easy, it appears to me," replied the banker, with emphasis.

"It would be so if I consented to give him my daughter. But his late course does not reassure me as to his future. If I thought that he had a chance of being accepted by the charming heiress whom you pointed out to me, I would urge him to court her."

"Ah! my dear baron, I did not imagine that you would speak in this way to me. I thought that you had other views for him."

"So I had, but my ideas have changed since I came here."

"Mine have changed in another way since I have seen Mademoiselle de Trémorin. You spoke of her in your letters as almost a child. I did not suppose that she was of marriageable age, and, in accordance with my wife's idea, I made it a point to introduce your nephew to Mademoiselle Fourcas. I thought yesterday, however, that Mademoiselle de Trémorin had formed an attachment for her cousin, and he for her, and that you did not disapprove of it, and I concluded that it would be useless to think of marrying the viscount to the heiress."

"You were wrong, my dear Montauron," said the baron, shaking his head. "Savinien ought to esteem himself very fortunate in attracting the attention of so wealthy a girl. I should be grateful to you if you would help on the match."

"I am afraid that it is too late."

"Why? Has Mademoiselle Fourcas heard of his acts of folly?"

"No, but she was present when you brought Monsieur d'Amaulis to the kiosk."

"And she saw that young lady, my daughter, fling herself into his arms? Did this display of affection towards a cousin shock the heiress's nerves?"

"Didn't you see her face?"

"No. I was talking to Madame Montauron."

"Well, she turned extremely pale, and was so overcome that she was obliged to leave soon afterwards, saying that she was not well."

"That is true. I remember it now. She is jealous, then? That is a good sign, and shows that my flighty nephew has not lost his chance with her."

"Perhaps so, but for myself I don't think that there is much chance left. My wife thought that this marriage might take place before Mademoiselle Fourcas saw Mademoiselle de Trémorin, but she does not think so now."

"There are other chances for him. It is for Savinien to make a desirable match. I myself will find a husband for Yvonne, and I came to Paris with that intention. You know, my friend, that I am lucky as a match-maker."

This allusion to the past made Montauron start, but he did not speak a word, and M. de Trémorin resumed, with an easy air: "Speaking of your marriage, which I helped to bring about, it must be confessed that strange things happen to us in this life. The first time that I set foot in your house since you married Aurélie, I come upon a personage who used to occupy our thoughts to a great extent twelve years ago, and whom we had not since met until now."

"Who may that be?" stammered the banker, changing colour.

"Good heavens! don't you know? The cavalier of that woman who made such a scene at the kiosk where Madame Montauron and Mademoiselle Fourcas were selling cigars. I am very sorry that I wasn't there,

and if, when you told me about the occurrence, you had said that it was the Swede whom I took to task in so unsparing a manner in former times. I should have gone after him to renew the tongue-lashing which I gave him in the year 1869. This time, I would have cut off his ears besides."

"You would have done wrong, then! I saw him, and I took good care not to pick a quarrel with him. Out of consideration for my wife, I did not wish to stir up forgotten things."

"I understand that, but she must have been greatly annoyed by his reappearance, and I should be very glad to make him leave Paris once more and retire to foreign parts."

"I should think that it would be better to dismiss this man altogether from your mind," replied M. Montauron coldly. "I intentionally refrained from speaking of him to you yesterday. Who told you that it was he who accompanied the girl?"

"My nephew."

"What! does Monsieur d'Amaulis know him?"

"Certainly; they belong to the same club."

The banker turned pale and looked down without replying. He was thinking of the casket, the withdrawal of which he had been for two weeks endeavouring to prevent, and the information now derived from M. de Trémorin filled his mind with many fresh conjectures respecting it.

"That is not everything," resumed the baron. "My nephew also knows the girl whom this Aparanda accompanied to your fair. It was at her house that he lost the money he had won on 'Change.'"

"I knew that he was acquainted with her," replied M. Montauron absently. "My wife told me that this woman addresssed Monsieur d'Amaulis in a familiar manner; but I did not know that he had played cards at her house. That was a very great mistake on his part."

"What will you say when I tell you that he played with Count Aparanda, who won all his money from him? Isn't it a blunder to play with a man of bad character with whom nobody will have anything to do, and be plundered by him? Am I not a thousand times right in holding D'Amaulis off as a suitor for my daughter's hand?"

"If he is intimate with this foreigner, you are certainly not wrong in doing so," replied the banker, who was following the thread of his own conjectures.

"No, he isn't intimate with him. That would be too outrageous. On the contrary, they don't speak to one another, but it was even going too far to spend one or two evenings in such company as that of this scoundrel."

"Ah! they don't speak to one another?" replied Montauron, thoughtfully.

"Savinien recently cut him dead. It was not my nephew's fault if a duel did not result."

"But there has been some connection between them," insisted Aurélie's husband, looking up.

"None but a formal one, I hope, for the honour of the name of Amaulis."

"Where can they have met?"

"At this so-called 'club,' most likely, a club with a name I don't remember, but where everybody can get in. Savinien was introduced there by a certain George Fougerey, whom I suspect doesn't belong to very select society."

"He carries on risky speculations at the Bourse and elsewhere. He is

no fit companion for Monsieur d'Amaulis. I told the viscount all about the moral character of his friend."

"His friend? This Fougeray isn't my nephew's friend. There is nothing more than the recollection of their school-days to make them acquainted. But let us go back to that bird of ill-omen who has turned up again after twelve years' absence. What do you think of his unlooked-for return?"

"I don't think anything about it whatever," replied M. Montauron, with some embarrassment.

"Come, now, my dear friend," began the baron, earnestly, "we have known each other a long time, and can certainly speak to each other without disguise. It is impossible that since your marriage you should never have thought of this paltry scamp who so nearly compromised Aurélie before she became your wife."

"I have not forgotten him, but I have never made any inquiries about him," said M. Montauron, sullenly.

"I understand that, and I am sure that Madame Montauron has never thought of him except with anger. I hoped, for my own part, that he had gone to some far-off country where adventurers resort. But here he is again, and this specimen of his behaviour yesterday is not calculated to reassure us as to his intentions."

"You believe, then, that he is disposed to interfere with my domestic peace?"

"He could not disturb that, I'm sure, but he is capable of anything—for example, of slandering your wife."

"With what motive?"

"In order to extort money from her to make him hold his tongue."

"Hold his tongue! What can he have to say?"

"Nothing of any consequence, of course not, but he may invent things——"

"Madame Montauron's character is above his attacks."

"Certainly, but it would be none the less painful should he set stories afoot respecting her."

"Should any such stories come to my ears, I should know how to put an end to them."

"It would be better to prevent them by signifying to this man that if he ventures to articulate your name he will have to deal with me. I have been thinking of this ever since my nephew related yesterday's scene to me."

"Allow me to say," replied Montauron, gravely, "that your interference in this matter would be incomprehensible. It is for me to defend my own honour."

"Very well, my dear friend," replied M. de Trémorin. "I thought, however, that I had the right to interest myself in what concerned the daughter of my old friend, Monsieur de Louvigné; but, as you see things in a different light, let us say no more on the matter."

"On the contrary, I have something to say. Allow me also to ask you to explain a fact which has often surprised me. You have been several times in Paris since my marriage, and have never once called on Madame Montauron."

"Can you suppose that I avoided doing so?"

"Yes; and I have wondered why."

"Have you discovered any reason for it?" asked the baron, in a tone of irony.

"I don't know. I have sometimes thought that you regretted having married us."

"In other words, you suspect me of having deceived you when I guaranteed the virtue of Mademoiselle de Louvigné. You have a very bad opinion of me, my dear friend, and you should remember that while I approved of your wish to marry Aurélie, I did not hide anything from you that I knew. I told you everything, perhaps even more than there was to tell, for I attached undue importance to a passing fancy. I have, therefore, nothing to reproach myself with. As for my failure to call, it had no other reason than want of time. I never have spent more than forty-eight hours in Paris at a time, and I did not wish to spend more, as my presence at Plouër was indispensable. I was engaged in farming land which I only made up my mind a month ago to let. The proof that I had no other reason is, that I sent my nephew to Madame Montauron, and that this time, as now I expect to stay in Paris for some weeks, my first visit was to her, and besides, if this explanation is not all-sufficient, I will add, that I took my daughter, also, to visit her." All this was said in a resolute and dignified manner which impressed the banker greatly.

There was a moment's silence. The Breton nobleman looked fixedly at the banker, and tried to read his feelings in his face.

"My dear Montauron," he resumed at last, "I do not feel any grudge against you, but I pity you from the bottom of my heart; for I have discovered that you are suffering from a malady which causes much pain, and which is hard to cure. You are jealous, my poor friend, and jealous of the past, which is still worse."

"It is true!" exclaimed the unhappy man. "Why should I conceal it from you? After twelve years of cloudless happiness, I have for a month past lived in horrible torments."

"Good heavens! you terrify me! For a month past, you say? What can have happened? What catastrophe has occurred? Is it the return of this detestable Aparanda?"

"No. I did not know until yesterday that he *had* returned. Still, it is possible that this man may be the cause of my misfortune," said Montauron in a hesitating manner.

"Then you, yourself, are not certain as to what has happened?" asked the baron in surprise.

"You will think me a madman, and perhaps I am, indeed, mad. But I don't know who is to blame in all this. Inexplicable things take place around me. I have suspicions which I cannot verify. I mistrust my wife, and I dare not accuse her to her face. I am leading a life of anguish. It would be a million times better to be sure than thus in doubt. I should kill the man who is to blame, or he would kill me, and that would end it."

"But who in the name of all that is rational can it be? What do your suspicions rest upon? What are the facts?"

"There are facts which I cannot explain to myself."

"May I be hanged or guillotined if I can make out what you possibly mean by all this," said M. de Trémorin. "Tell me something of a precise nature."

"You might assist me in finding out something of that kind."

"How?"

"By answering the questions I will ask you, and answering them frankly."

"The word 'frankly' means that you doubt my frankness, but never mind that. Go on!"

"Well, then, I wish to know whether Monsieur Savinien d'Amanlis has any valuable objects belonging to him."

"My nephew! What has he got to do with all this, great heavens! What have his possessions to do with you? Don't you know as well as I do what he owns and what he doesn't? I have told you twenty times that he had six thousand francs a year from his land, and all that I have not expended for his education and support has been put into your banking business. There is a large sum to his credit, of which, however, he knows nothing."

"I am aware of that, but I ask you whether he may not have laid up money in some way or other, money which he may have brought to Paris."

"Laid up money! Out of what? At Plouër he never had any money to dispose of. There is no occasion for spending-money in that place. Savinien came here with his letter of credit and some fifteen louis."

"In a casket?"

"A casket! What need would there be of a casket for three hundred francs? What can you be thinking of?" asked M. de Trémorin, who did not try to conceal his amazement.

"I am greatly obliged to you for telling me this, my dear baron," was the reply; "but I will now ask another and more confidential question."

"About Savinien?"

"Yes. I will take the liberty of asking you whether he has ever corresponded with any woman?"

"Come now, Montauron," exclaimed M. de Trémorin, "will you be kind enough to tell me what you mean by these strange questions?" and the baron rose impatiently.

Montauron, instead of replying, eagerly seized the tube of a telephone which had just given a warning ring, and, applying his lips to the orifice, said: "I am here: is the person in the vaults?"

The reply was not long in coming, but it only reached the ear of M. Montauron, who was holding the tube. The baron saw that the banker at once changed countenance,

"What is the matter?" asked he. "Is your stock going down? or is the Spanish Mobilier going up?"

"Nothing of the kind," replied the banker; "but I am sent for, and must go down stairs at once."

"Why don't you let the person come here? It seems to me that the master oughtn't to be disturbed by the man."

"It is something very particular, and I am obliged to leave you."

"You shall not leave me till you explain yourself more clearly. I wish to know what you mean by your strange questions about Savinien."

"I will tell you; but I must go away for a few moments, and if you will remain here I will return to you."

"No, no! I want an immediate and clear explanation. Why do you ask me whether my nephew ever kept up an amorous correspondence, and whether he had saved up any money?"

"On account of a casket in which he may have placed some letters or some money."

"There you are again with your casket! Speak in an intelligible manner, my friend, or I shall begin to think that you are making fun of me," testily said M. de Trémorin.

"Making fun of you! I have no wish to do that, I swear to you! Give me a quarter of an hour, and I will tell you everything," rejoined Montauron,

"Tell me everything now!"

"I haven't the time, and besides, I cannot tell you anything positive until I have seen a person who is down stairs now."

Montauron, who had not let go of the india-rubber tube, again applied his lips to the orifice, and said to the clerk at the desk on the ground floor: "I am coming."

"You had better add 'ask him to wait,'" said M. de Trémorin, placing himself in such a position as to prevent the banker from leaving the room.

"You hardly mean to prevent me leaving my office, I presume!" exclaimed the banker, in a tone of great anger.

"I mean to know why you busy yourself so much about the conduct of Viscount d'Amaulis. I am his uncle, and I represent him. I do what he would do if he were here."

"You don't know how matters stand."

"Tell me, then!"

"It would take too long. For mercy's sake, baron, do not detain me! My peace, my honour are at stake!"

"This is perfectly incredible! Any one would think that your wife was concerned in all this, that you were talking about her," said the baron.

"She is concerned in it. I am talking of her."

"Do you mean to say that you believe Savinien to be her lover?"

"I don't know, and I want to find out."

"My dear friend, jealousy has upset your mind. Savinien never beheld Madame Montauron until a month ago. A few moments since you said that you believed him to be madly in love with his cousin. So be reasonable and admit that your suspicions are absurd."

"That may be, but let me satisfy myself."

"How? By talking to a clerk who has called you through a tube? But this is insanity itself," said the old nobleman.

"Do you believe me to be capable of telling a falsehood?"

"Certainly not."

"I swear to you that at this moment my future happiness is at stake. If I lose this opportunity of clearing up a doubt which is killing me, I shall have no resource but death; and I would rather die than live as I am now living. In the name of all you hold dear, in the name of our old friendship, let me go!"

This was said in such a tone that M. de Trémorin could not offer any resistance. Besides, he felt how ridiculous his position would become if he attempted any longer to prevent the director of the Provincial Bank from leaving his office, and he did not care to come to an actual hand to hand struggle with the over-excited financier, who, besides, would only have had to ring a bell to summon half a dozen clerks to his help.

"I should be very sorry for you to die," he answered, turning the matter into a jest. "Go, my dear friend, go! But don't ask me to wait for you here. Our accounts have been looked over, and I rely upon your clearing up this matter to my satisfaction this evening or to-morrow."

"I promise to do so," said Montauron, whose hand was already on the knob of an inner door which communicated with a staircase leading to the vaults.

"Good-bye, then, till I see you again, and don't cudgel your brains about Savinien. I'll risk my head that he is perfectly innocent."

The banker vanished behind the door like a conspirator in a melodrama, and M. de Trémorin, left to himself, went off shrugging his shoulders as he opened the other door which communicated with the main staircase.

"May the fiend fly away with me," said he to himself, as he went down two or three steps at a time, "if I can understand what the worthy fellow means with his talk about caskets, and love-letters, and savings accumulated by my nephew! There is evidently something in it all, however. Aparanda has been meddling. But how has my nephew become involved in all these ugly matters? I must question him thoroughly, and as soon as possible, for Montauron is so awfully excited that he may do something rash. Where am I to find Savinien, now that I have sent him about his business until to-morrow? That was a bad idea, and I have a great mind to go to his rooms and see if he is there. But Yvonne is waiting for me. Poor Yvonne! if she only knew what her cousin is accused of! I shall say nothing, not a word, however, for I have promised not to try to influence her in any way."

While the baron reflected he reached the courtyard open to the public. There was a crowd there as usual, and it was necessary to thread one's way through the group of people in order to reach the exit on the Avenue de l'Opéra. While M. de Trémorin was trying his utmost to get through the busy mob, he was rudely jostled by some one who was walking in the same direction, but much faster than himself. And, as patience was not his greatest quality, he began to apostrophise this hurried individual, and exclaimed: "Take care! what the mischief are you doing?"

On hearing this, several people turned their heads, but the man who had jostled him kept on his way without attempting to apologise. The baron, angered by this rudeness, was about to repeat his words, and even to emphasise them, when, on looking at the individual who was running on ahead, he thought that he recognised his nephew.

"That is strange," said he, muttering to himself. "That man looks like my nephew. It is he! Where has he come from, and what is he running for, as if he had an armed policeman after him? I will find this out."

Striding along, and in his turn jostling everybody whom he found in his way, the uncle now reached the threshold of the main door at the very moment when the man whom he was pursuing darted with great rapidity on to the side walk, and went off in the direction of the boulevard.

"Savinien!" exclaimed M. de Trémorin, in a clear and sonorous voice, that of a naval officer accustomed to command.

Viscount d'Amaulis turned as he heard him, but did not stop. He made a sign which the baron failed to understand, and set off at a full run without caring who was after him.

"That is a little too much!" grumbled the baron; "the young scamp is mocking me, but he shan't escape." And, forgetting his dignity as an uncle, he set off after the fugitive, who had all the advantage in the race.

At the first corner Savinien turned abruptly and disappeared. But M. de Trémorin did not give up the pursuit. He went on even faster, and, coming to the corner, he again caught sight of the object of his arduous chase, and continued to pursue him at the same rate all along the Rue d'Antin. He again called out, and this time with unlooked-for effect, for Viscount d'Amaulis darted under a door-way and did not reappear.

"Ah! the rascal!" said the old nobleman, stopping to draw breath. "He is under cover, but if he thinks that he has escaped me he is mistaken. I would rather mount guard before the house where he has run to earth until to-morrow morning! But I'll do better than that. I'll question the doorkeeper, who will tell me where he has gone."

It was time for the chase to come to an end. The baron had never been a foot soldier, and could only hunt on horseback. He was utterly exhausted, and panting with anger as well as fatigue.

"Upon my word of honour!" he muttered, as he wiped his forehead, "any one might think that Savinien had been robbing the Provincial Bank. I thought the young scamp had a box or a bag in his hand, and that reminds me of Montauron's jargon about a—— But no!—it is too absurd, an Amaulis wouldn't steal!" As the baron muttered these words, he reached the doorway which Savinien had entered. This doorway was that of a well kept house. Carriages could not enter by it, but it led to a vestibule with a marble pavement and a stucco ceiling. Beyond was a staircase, somewhat wide, and well waxed. On the right was the doorkeeper's room, which was almost as handsome as the drawing-room of a country house. All the distinctive signs by which the abodes of middle-class citizens are recognisable in Paris, were to be found here. People who keep carriages do not live in such houses, nor do the poor. They are only suited to persons in comfortable circumstances but not wealthy.

M. de Trémorin took in all this at a glance, for he was much more of a Parisian than he looked, but he saw nothing of Viscount d'Amaulis. Savinien had, no doubt, gone to see some one in the house, some one with whom he was acquainted, and as he was evidently trying to avoid his uncle, he might perhaps remain for hours. The baron was not disposed to wait for him until it pleased him to come down again, and so he had recourse at once to strong measures. He went into the doorkeeper's room, where he found a very stylish-looking young lady, who was reading a printed play, of the kind sold by Tresse, the theatrical publisher, and who scarcely condescended to raise her eyes as he asked, "Can you tell me what became of that gentleman?"

"What gentleman?" said the doorkeeper's presumptive heiress, disdainfully.

"The one who went in just now, about two minutes ago."

"I was studying my part. I did not see anybody."

"That is impossible. Your door was open, and the gentleman was running like a madman; you must have noticed him."

"Do you suppose that it is my business to spy upon the people who come here?" asked the young person, with a pert look.

"Your business is to watch over the security of the house, I presume. And if you don't look at those who come in, a robber may find his way in here."

"A robber! Are you looking for a robber? Are you a detective?"

"Do I look like one? Take care what you say!"

This was the moment or never to offer a louis to this future queen of the stage, and the baron put his hand into his pocket, just as the repeated noise of a bell, violently pulled, caught his ear.

"The bell is ringing very loudly up there. You must know whose it is."

"It is on the second floor," answered the young person, already in a milder tone, as she saw the baron fumbling for his purse.

"What is the name of the tenant on the second floor?"

"He is a very respectable young gentleman, who does not receive any but respectable people."

"I do not pretend the contrary; but you would greatly oblige me if you would tell me his name," replied M. de Trémorin, holding out a twenty-franc piece.

The talisman produced its effect. The reader rose and approached the gentleman who wished to bribe her at so liberal a rate.

"The gentleman, in question, would have no objection to have his name mentioned," she said, bridling up. "His name is Monsieur Fougeray."

"George Fougeray, the broker!" exclaimed the baron.

"The same. Do you know him?"

"Yes, yes, I do, and the proof of it is that I am going to see him now. You say that he lives on the second floor?"

"The door on the left. But he is not at home."

"No matter," answered M. de Trémorin, throwing the gold piece upon a waiting table which stood within his reach. He then darted from the room to the stairs. He knew now what to think, and did not fear that his nephew would make his escape, for he had made up his mind to get somehow or other into the rooms of this fellow Fougeray, who appeared to be mixed up in all the foolish acts of Viscount d'Amaulis.

The bell rang again. This was a favourable sign. It proved that Savinien was still on the landing, and the baron immediately began to hope that he should be able to catch him in the very act of seeking shelter.

He crept softly up the stairs, and reached the second floor at the very moment when the viscount, quite discouraged, had given up ringing, and was about to come down again.

The uncle and nephew met face to face, and an animated conversation began at once.

"I hold you at last!" exclaimed the angry old nobleman, "and you will be kind enough to explain why you forced me to run after you."

"I could not guess that you were following me," replied the nephew, with vexation.

"Ah! that is a little too much! You saw me perfectly well, and heard me call out to you, for you turned round; but it seems that you wished to avoid me."

"You? Oh no!"

"Who, then? The police?"

Then, as Savinien did not reply, M. de Trémorin resumed vehemently: "I am surprised that you were not arrested as a thief. You came out of the Provincial Bank, and robbers, I presume, sometimes get in there. When they are pursued they don't run any faster than you did."

The viscount hung his head, and persisted in saying nothing.

"Will you speak, or not?" resumed M. de Trémorin. "I want a clear explanation. What did you go to the Provincial Bank for? You cannot say that you went to draw out any money, as your credit is exhausted there. Montauron told me that you had no more money to draw."

"You have just seen him, then?"

"I have just left him. I was coming from his office when you jostled me as I was crossing the courtyard. He had a great deal to say about you."

"What did he say?"

"Ah! you are becoming interested now! Well, if you wish to know, tell me, first of all, where you were coming from when I met you."

"I had been there to ask for information."

"What! are you making fun of me? What business do you ply that necessitates your asking for any information at a bank? You have no money to put into business, and you won't, I presume, undertake to tell me that you have deposited valuables at Montauron's banking-house?"

"I cannot explain myself on this landing," replied Savinien.

"Very well, come with me. I don't care any more than you do to stand like a stork on one leg at Monsieur Fougeray's door."

"You know that he lives here, then?"

"I have just been told so. It cost me a louis to find it out, but I do not regret it, as I have caught you. But enough of this. The Rue du Helder hotel is conveniently near. You can go there with me and confess all about this matter, or I will never see you again as long as I live."

"I will do whatever you wish, uncle, but I prefer to wait a while before leaving this house."

"What do you want to wait for? For your friend Fougeray to appear? Do you intend to allow that gentleman to take part in our conversation?"

"That isn't what I want; but can you tell me whether you left Monsieur Montauron in his office or not?"

"That is a strange question, as strange as your present behaviour, and if I reply to it, it is only because I wish to give you no further excuse. No, I did not leave Monsieur Montauron in his office. Montauron was summoned by the telephone and went down."

"To the vaults?" asked Savinien.

"Yes. How did you know that, if you please?" retorted his uncle, wrathfully,

"I did not know it. I asked you."

"Enough cross-questioning. Let us go."

"Will you allow me to send the doorkeeper for a cab?"

"What for?" cried uncle Trémorin. "Can't you walk, or are you afraid of being stopped in the street? I warn you, my lad, that you are beginning to provoke me by your reservations! If you continue to withhold an explanation from me, I shall seriously begin to believe that you have committed some bad act. You look at this moment like a criminal in presence of a judge. You dare not raise your eyes, you seem to be bending over, you hold your elbows close to your sides, and—Heaven forgive me!—I could almost swear that you have got a bag of money under your coat!"

Savinien started, and the gesture which he involuntarily made displayed an object which he had been hiding to the best of his ability while M. de Trémorin had been questioning him.

"I am not mistaken!" exclaimed his uncle. "You are holding a steel casket, a portable coffer! What does this mean? Where did you get this casket, you scamp?"

"You don't suppose that I stole it, I hope?" replied the nephew.

"I don't know," replied the exasperated baron. "Prove that you haven't, or I——"

He did not finish what he was about to say. Some one was coming up the stairs in haste, and Savinien already blessed this happy diversion, which for the moment averted the necessity of explaining. A few seconds

later George Fougeray appeared on the landing, and immediately recognised M. de Trémorin whom he had formerly known at Rennes. He made haste to salute him, addressing him by his title of baron, and offered his hand to Savinien, who looked very much out of spirits.

"If I had thought that you were coming to see me to-day," said George with a careless air, "I should not have absented myself, especially if I could have guessed that your uncle would do me the honour——"

"You are Monsieur Fougeray, are you not?" interrupted the baron hastily.

"Baron, I am, and I cannot thank you sufficiently for having taken the trouble to——"

"Don't thank me, sir," cried M. de Trémorin. "It is my nephew whom I came here after; and as I have found him I will ask you to admit us into your rooms and leave us to ourselves for a few moments."

"I am at your orders, baron," replied George with some surprise. "There is the smoking-room where you can talk privately, while I write a few letters in my room which is at the other end of the flat."

The old nobleman hesitated for a moment. This proximity annoyed him, but it was difficult to turn M. Fougeray out of his own room, and he wished to settle matters with Savinien.

"Very well, sir," he replied. "Be kind enough to open the door and show us in."

This way of proceeding was not exactly courteous, but M. de Trémorin knew what kind of man he had to deal with, and George Fougeray did not appear to take it amiss. He was too intelligent to refuse to do a favour to a man who might some day be useful to him. In the situation in which he found himself he was altogether disposed to conciliate everybody, and especially a wealthy capitalist. So he opened the door with all alacrity, and ushered the baron into his rooms.

Savinien followed his uncle, still very dejected, and trying to prepare himself for an explanation which he would gladly have avoided.

"Excuse me, sir, for receiving you in this bachelor's hole," said Fougeray, politely. "I am only a new-comer in Paris in the matter of luxury, although I have lived here for years."

"It seems to me that you have done pretty well," replied the baron, glancing at the furniture in an absent manner. "I know very honest people who have worked all their lives, and who would be glad to live as handsomely. It is true that they are not speculators at the Bourse."

This thrust prevented George from making any further attempt at conversation. He thought that M. de Trémorin had heard of the profits realised by his nephew in a certain peculiar speculation, and he feared that the old nobleman, who was a man of strong prejudices, might ask him to explain the part he had played in that matter.

"I will leave you, gentlemen," said he, pushing forward an arm-chair for the baron. "Amaulis knows where the cigars are kept. Act, I beg, exactly as though you were at home. I shall not come in unless you do me the honour to call me."

With this courteous assurance he raised a curtain, which separated the smoking-room from a library, or "working-room"—in which he never worked—then, before going further, he carefully fastened the curtain back, a delicate attention, which was intended to show M. de Trémorin that he might speak without fear of being overheard. Indeed the room in which George shut himself up, after taking this precaution, was separated from

the smoking-room by the entire length of the library, which, as the curtain was raised and the door open, the baron could see was altogether unoccupied.

While these preparations for a formidable interview were being made, Savinien was suffering untold agony. He understood but too well that he would be sharply questioned by his uncle, and that the latter would not be satisfied with evasive answers. How could he tell him the truth, however, without revealing Madame Montauron's secret? M. de Trémorin had no knowledge of this secret. The conversation, which had followed upon the breakfast at the *Lion d'Or*, had left no doubt in Savinien's mind upon that point. To reveal it now would in his eyes be tantamount to dishonouring a woman for whom he had always felt a warm regard, and whom he still esteemed.

Until now, Savinien had always been able to get out of his difficulties by evasive answers. Nothing showed that he had been taken into confidence by Madame Montauron, still less by Count Aparanda. But his uncle on this occasion would evidently be close in his questioning, and attack him openly. The casket, the accursed casket, was there in his hands, and Savinien would surely be compelled to reveal whence it came. To avert the really painful humiliation of a culpable though penitent woman it was necessary to lie, to invent some story which M. de Trémorin would probably not believe. One can only escape from false situations by sacrifices of principle, when indeed a catastrophe does not occur.

Savinien now placed the steel casket, which he could no longer hide, upon the table, and waited in silence for his uncle to open fire.

"Sit down," said M. de Trémorin, coldly, as he ensconced himself in the arm-chair which George Fougeray had offered him before he went into the adjoining room. "We have a great deal to go over, I should say, and these matters can hardly be explained while you remain standing."

Savinien sunk into a chair.

"I now know," pursued the baron, "why you ran so fast, came here, and are afraid to go out again. You were afraid of being followed by Monsieur Montauron, and you are still afraid that you may meet him."

There came a pause, and then the old nobleman added: "I will tell you how I know that this is the case. I was in Montauron's office just now, and he spoke of a casket which he said that you possessed, and which contained either letters or money. I did not understand this, and I was urging him to explain himself, when he left me to go to the vaults. I tried to detain him. I did not succeed, and I was going away very much disturbed in mind and completely puzzled, when I met you, running off as fast as you could. Fortunately, I have caught you, and I find you laden with this casket, which I now see for the first time. I will not insult you by asking you whether you stole it or not, for I could never believe that my nephew could steal anything, and besides I can guess very closely what has happened. You deposited it at the banking-house where you had an account, and have just taken it back. This is perfectly proper, and there is no reason why you should make a mystery of it."

"I do not make a mystery of it," muttered Savinien.

"Because you cannot any longer deny its existence, but you were doing so a moment ago, as you were running away with it. Why were you trying to avoid Montauron? What is there in that mysterious box?"

"Monsieur Montauron, it would seem, has told you," stammered the viscount, whose head was beginning to whirl.

"I beg your pardon, Montauron asked me if you had any money savings, and I did not understand until afterwards the purport of the question. Now, you have no savings, that is very certain. You brought but a trifling sum of money from Plouër, and you admitted this morning that not a copper remained of what you made on 'Change.'"

"I may have made other money, and——"

"Stop! You are about to say what isn't true, and it is almost as bad to lie as to steal. If this casket is full of gold, open it and prove it to me. When I have seen the contents I will further request you to prove that the money is yours."

"I haven't the key."

"For the good reason that the casket isn't yours. If it were your own I should recognise it from having seen it in your room at Plouër, for it is a perfect work of art. You may say that you bought it in Paris. That may be, but I don't believe it, and as for its contents, it is not heavy enough to be filled with gold. It may have bank-notes inside, but I hear, as I shake it, the noise of some light object or other knocking against the sides. I now come to another supposition, which Montauron advanced. He questioned me as to whether you had any intrigue on hand, one of the kind in which letters are written, letters with which a deeply infatuated lover is never willing to part. I at once saw that he suspected that you had deposited your amorous correspondence at his bank."

"You answered him, I hope, that he was mistaken."

"I gave him no answer at all, for the excellent reason that I knew nothing about it, and I do not yet know," replied M. de Trémorin, looking steadily at his nephew, and, as Savinien cast down his eyes without replying, the baron resumed: "I naturally suppose that this casket is yours, as you act as though it belonged to you, and I must also consider the declaration which you have made to me to be true also. 'Monsieur Montauron,' you say to me, 'has told you what the casket contains.' Now, Montauron believes that it contains either money or love-letters. I, myself, lean towards this latter opinion. You declare that I am wrong. Prove it!"

"My entire life is the proof that you are wrong. Don't you know what it has been? I have never been separated from you from my childhood up."

"You were three years at Rennes. You were a volunteer for an entire year, without counting your trips to Dinard and St. Malo."

"At Rennes I was very near you. You saw me every two weeks. My service as a volunteer was in a regiment of dragoons garrisoned at Dinan, four leagues from Plouër. When I went to the seaside it was for a week at a time."

"Quite time enough to——"

"Begin a love affair? That may be. But had I been engaged in a serious affair the whole country-side would have rang with it."

"Everybody would have known it, perhaps, excepting me, my wife, and my daughter."

"I think, on the contrary, that you would have been the first to hear of it. Everything is known in the country. Do you assert that during the month that I have lived in Paris I have carried on an intrigue, and one leading to the exchange of love-letters?"

"I assert nothing whatever. I am simply waiting for you to justify yourself by giving me an explanation such as I can accept."

"You know," replied Savinien, whose eyes were full of tears, "that I have a deep attachment for my cousin. How could I love another woman at the same time?"

"That would, indeed, be very base, and since you speak of Yvonne, I declare to you that if you do not completely justify yourself as regards this story about this casket, she shall never become your wife. I do not admit that a shadow of doubt should rest upon the honourability of a son-in-law of mine, and I have a right to exact perfect frankness from you. I even declare that I will make my decision known to my daughter, and will tell her why I dismiss you as a suitor."

"Uncle, you would not do that!" exclaimed Savinien, who turned perceptibly pale."

"I will do it, on my word of honour," firmly replied M. de Trémorin; "if I did not do it I should be wanting in my duty as a father. I cannot suffer my daughter to remain unaware that you—who say you love her—are engaged in an intrigue—an intrigue which I can only qualify as being in every way a most mysterious affair."

"I swear to you that I have nothing whatever to reproach myself with, and that I have never ceased to adore Yvonne."

"Adore! What sort of talk is that? A man does not 'adore' a woman when he is going to marry her. He loves her truly and earnestly, and does not go about paying attentions to other women."

"Then you believe me to be lying? You believe that I have forgotten the vows exchanged between Yvonne and myself?"

"In the first place, I was not aware that any vows had been exchanged, and I think that that young lady, my daughter, ought to have consulted me before promising to do what she cannot do without my permission. At her age a girl has no right to make vows binding her future, and at your age no man can answer for his constancy. You have placed yourself in a position which I am forced to meddle with if only through interest in you. I cannot understand what is hidden in the story respecting this casket; but there is evidently something wrong in the matter, and it seems clear to me that you have set out on a bad road. I wish to stop you on the way, and especially to prevent Yvonne from following you. Mademoiselle de Trémorin cannot become the wife of any man whose life is not as clear as crystal, and you will admit that if you are in good faith."

While the baron spoke he had been stealthily examining his nephew's countenance, and he saw with satisfaction that his words produced a marked effect. Savinien was evidently much disturbed. He did not raise his eyes, and evidently feared to meet the old nobleman's searching look.

"Ah! uncle," said he, "you would not accuse me thus if you knew the facts."

"Great powers! I only ask to know them. For the last ten minutes I have been entreating you to tell them. I don't despair of your being able to justify yourself. Appearances are against you, but a man does not condemn his own nephew on the strength of appearances. Speak! tell me where this casket comes from, what it contains, and let that be the end of the matter."

"Supposing I told you that there is a secret in the affair, which is not mine?"

"I should not be satisfied with an explanation like that, which is no explanation at all."

"The proof that the casket is not mine, that it has merely been entrusted to me, is that I have not even the key of it."

"You told me that before, but it does not help the matter. I am willing to believe you, but be frank! You know what this 'surprise-box' contains?"

"I swear to you upon my honour that it has never been opened in my presence."

"Good! but the person who gave it to you told you what it contained."

"Yes," replied Savinien in a stifled tone.

"That is well!" exclaimed his uncle. "Here is the beginning of the confession. Make it complete. What is the treasure which you have been asked to take care of?"

"If I told you, you would guess everything."

"Very well. You persist in your mysteries. You will gain nothing by it, for I am determined to see the matter to the end. I am going to proceed from the known to the unknown, and you will see at last that you will be forced to confess everything. In the first place, you cannot deny that you have taken the casket away from the vaults where it was deposited."

"No, of course not, but——"

"I have only to ask the manager of the Provincial Bank when the deposit was made."

"Do not do that!" exclaimed Viscount d'Amaulis, hurriedly.

"This is as it should be!" cried M. de Trémorin. "You are coming to terms. I will help you. You don't want me to speak to Monsieur Montauron about the casket. I have no great difficulty in guessing why."

"What do you mean?"

"That Montauron is interested in the matter. I thought so. When I was in his office, he talked of nothing but Viscount d'Amaulis and a casket, and when one of his clerks summoned him down stairs by telephone he became excited to an extraordinary degree. He wished to go down to the vaults, but I detained him. I did well, for had I let him go, he would have surprised you, casket in hand."

"Great misfortunes would have been the result had he done so."

"Then I cannot regret having withheld the formidable financier. He was not himself at all, and had he met you, might have had recourse to violence."

"It isn't that I feared."

"No, you fear for another, for the woman to whom you intend to return the casket."

Savinien did not reply, but his silence and his dejection spoke plainly enough.

"I know who the lady is," quietly resumed M. de Trémorin.

"You, uncle! Impossible! Unless indeed she——"

"Unless, indeed, she has confided in me! No she has not. She will, I hope, but she has not yet done so. And—not to let you stumble about in denials, which you cannot keep up, I will tell you who she is. Her name is Madame Montauron."

"No! no! I protest that——"

"Protest as much as you please. I am sure that it is she. Montauron in his excitement told me no end of things which I did not wish to know. Thus it was that after asking me a great many questions, the aim of which

I could not comprehend, he ended by confessing that he is jealous of his wife and of you."

"Of me! The man must be mad!"

"So I told him, or about the same thing, but he persisted in what he said. I could not get any rational explanation from him. All that I could find out was that he was waiting for you to come in search of the famous casket. You must have been watched by the clerks who mount guard over the deposits, and but for me, you would not have been able to get away with this coffer. You see, my dear boy, that I know everything, and that it is too late to make mysteries. I don't blame you for being discreet, as a woman is concerned in the case, but the time has come for a clear elucidation. How is it that in a month's time you have become Madame Montauron's confidant? You had no acquaintance whatever with her a month ago. What is the nature of the connection which has arisen between you in so short a time?"

"What! Do you also suppose——"

"I have the right to demand a full explanation," interrupted the baron. "Should you refuse it, my mind will be made up. A gentleman never betrays the secret of a woman's weakness as regards himself. I shall think that you are acting like a gentleman, who, not wishing to confess or lie, remains silent. And I need not add that I shall beg of you to dismiss all thoughts of Yvonne."

"Uncle, you place me in a frightful position."

"No. If, as I hope, you are not Madame Montauron's lover, there is no reason why you should not tell me the facts as they exist. I know Madame Montauron much better than you can know her, since I know her past, as I related it to you this morning at the Lion d'Or. It is probable that if I, instead of Viscount d'Amaulic, had come to Paris, it would have been to me and not to that very young gentleman that she would have confided her sorrows, for it was I whom she chose as her defender formerly, and I am still here to act as such. I shall see her this evening, and it is probable that she will tell me everything. You can therefore speak out. Come, what mission has she given you?"

"I should prefer that she should tell you herself."

"If it concerns Count Aparanda, there is no mystery to be kept up."

"As regards him, no; but Madame Montauron's secret is her own."

"Her secret! What secret? She has no secret that I don't know of. I know very well that she had a flirtation with the Swede, and that letters were exchanged. Are that scoundrel's letters in this casket? Of course not; she would not have asked you to deposit them in the Provincial Bank. It would have been much easier to have burned them; and, now I think of it, what put such a strange idea into your head as to take this casket to a banking-house directed by her husband?"

"When I did so, I did not know the name of the lady who had confided it to me."

"We are going back to mystification, then? I begin to think that you are making fun of me," answered M. de Trémorin, impatiently. "Let us leave this. It does not suit me to continue this conversation. I will tell Madame Montauron what has passed between us, and I shall act according to what she says to me. I have but one more question to ask of you, and I presume that you will not refuse to reply to it. What are you going to do with this casket?"

At this question, which Savinien might have foreseen, he lost his self-

possession. By telling the truth he would gradually have been compelled to confess the existence of the child of Aurélie de Louvigné and Count Aparanda. He felt this danger approaching, and so he remained silent.

"This is going too far!" exclaimed his uncle, rising abruptly. "I renounce the idea of obtaining anything from you, and I beg of you also to renounce all thoughts of your cousin."

"Give me a few days to justify myself!" exclaimed Savinien. "Tomorrow I shall, perhaps, be allowed to speak; to-day I cannot say anything."

"Then I shall leave you," replied M. de Trémorin, going towards the door. "You can come to see me when you have made up your mind to explain your conduct." And, without giving his nephew time to add a single word, the angry uncle left the room, and went down the stairs faster than he had climbed them.

Savinien ran to the window, and saw him direct his steps towards the Rue du Helder.

"He is going to join Yvonne," thought the poor lover, "and Heaven only knows what he will say to her about me. No matter! I am glad that I remained firm. When he knows the truth, he will approve of the course I have pursued. It remains with Madame Montauron to tell the facts, and I hope that she will not fail to do so this evening. I hope that she will even charge him with the mission to the Swede. My uncle could manage that disagreeable matter much better than I could, but what shall I do while waiting for him to take my place?"

It was not easy to find an answer to this question, and Savinien sadly returned to his chair to think it over. He rested his elbows upon the table on which he had placed the casket, and, forgetting that his obliging friend George Fougerey was waiting near by to be allowed to enter, he became lost in thought of anything but an enlivening character. The situation was indeed a trying one, and there was yet much to do.

Supposing that Aparanda consented to give up the child on receiving the diamonds, the help of the faithful Brigitte would now be necessary, for she knew the child whom Savinien had never seen. Savinien also needed the key of the casket in order to open it, and Madame Montauron had omitted to give it to him when instructing him as to what he was to do as regards the diamonds. It was not to be hoped that Aparanda would conclude the negotiations without seeing the jewels. Before interviewing him, it was necessary to see the lady or her confidential servant, and he asked himself whether he would not do better to profit by the occasion to rid himself of the casket which had given him so much trouble. He had, after all, merely promised to take it back, and could now rightfully confine himself to restoring it to Madame Montauron or her servant, instead of undertaking a perilous campaign.

M. de Trémorin was the rightful defender of Aurélie de Louvigné, and if she resolved to confess everything fully to him, he would undoubtedly consent to treat in her name with an enemy whom he had long known, and whom he could prevent from harming her. In any case, Savinien risked nothing by awaiting the result of the interview which his uncle would have with Madame Montauron; and for the moment there was nothing to be done but to take away that accursed coffer. He was about to do so, when he recollected the husband, whom he had forgotten, and who, however, must needs be remembered. What had become of him since his, Savinien's, flight from the vaults? He could not have dared

to set out after him in the streets and give him chase, nor was it to be supposed that he had quietly returned to his office and his business. It was rather to be feared that he had hidden himself near the house in the Rue Rembrandt, where he must suppose that Savinien would soon appear with the casket under his arm.

Montauron had a brougham with an excellent horse standing ready for him. He could arrive in the Rue Rembrandt before M. d'Amaulis, who could only use a cab. The idea of stopping the viscount on his way must, besides, have occurred to him. Even supposing that he did not wish to watch him himself, nothing would prevent his charging the doorkeeper with this unpleasant task, and himself undertaking to watch his own house in the Avenue Ruysdaël, so as to see that the viscount did not enter it.

"If I am seen with this casket about me all will be lost," said Savinien to himself. "I must return home with empty hands."

A slight noise caused him to turn his head. George Fougeray was peeping out of the bed-room, the door of which he had opened cautiously.

"You can come in now, I am alone," called out Viscount d'Amaulis.

"I thought that I heard nothing more," replied George, who entered as he spoke. "Don't imagine that I was listening behind the door; no, I was sitting at the other end of the room writing a letter, but Monsieur de Trémorin spoke so loud that the sound of his voice reached my ears. When all became silent again I thought that you had both gone off, English fashion, without saying good-bye. But here you are, and all is well. Would it be indiscreet to ask how you happened to meet each other on my landing?"

"My uncle saw me in the street and I did not see him. He ran up after me, and did not overtake me till he reached your staircase."

"You would have preferred to avoid him, would you not? You have just had a good lecture. Has he found out that your note is in Pinchard's hands?"

"No, very fortunately. He is angry enough as it is."

"The fact is that the old gentleman does not look as though he were easy to deal with. I can now understand why you don't dare to ask him to pay your debts. It is a great pity, as everything is upside down, and the note is almost due."

"What do you mean by upside down? You will be ready to meet it, I hope?"

"I shall do my best, but I am in fear of a bad liquidation on the fifteenth. The 'Ottoman' stock is running down."

"The deuce it is! and here am I relying upon you! If you don't pay I dare not think what would happen."

"The note would be protested, that is what would happen. It won't kill us."

"My uncle would never forgive me for having compromised myself."

"He would know nothing about it. Besides, whatever happens I shall not allow any one to sue you. Don't torment yourself, and let us talk of something else. You came to see me to-day; what did you wish?"

"Nothing. I was passing by and came in."

"Tell me frankly that you were trying to get rid of Monsieur de Trémorin who was behind you? Ah! you must be afraid of him, to hide like a schoolboy who has been running away from his lessons. Where were you coming from when he began to run after you?"

"I was going home."

"That reply—worthy of Normandy—doesn't tell me where you had been; but then you are not called upon to tell me. But what is this casket doing among my cigars? Is that pretty thing yours?"

"I brought it here."

"The work is very fine. That must be worth something, without counting what may be inside it. Are you collecting articles of *virtù* just now? I didn't know that your taste ran that way."

Savinien said nothing. He hesitated to give utterance to an idea which had just occurred to him. "Where did you buy that?" asked George.

"It does not belong to me. It has been entrusted to me. I don't know where to put it."

"Take it home with you."

"No, I am scarcely ever in my rooms, and my drawers close so badly."

"Well, then, take it to the Provincial Bank. There are vaults there for such things."

Amaulis started; for this advice seemed to allude to his former request as to the casket. But George had no malicious intentions.

"You don't, perhaps, care to take Montauron and Bouret into your confidence anent these little affairs," he said.

"Exactly!" replied Savinien. "Have you a safe or a chest here?"

"A safe, my dear friend, and one of the best imaginable. It was the first thing that I bought when I took this second floor. A man does not appear to be in earnest unless he has a safe, especially when he does business."

"Well, then, will you do me the favour to put this casket inside it?"

"Willingly, the more so as it will procure me the pleasure of seeing you here again when you come to take it back. You haven't come very often of late. It is a month since you set foot here."

"That's true, and I beg of you to overlook it; but I will return to-morrow or the day after."

"The sooner the better. But let me know the day before, as I go out a great deal. I am doing all I can to make arrangements to meet that confounded bill."

"I will write to you or send you a telegram."

"Then let us go into my bed-room. My safe is at the head of my bed."

Savinien took the casket up and followed George, who led him to a safe secured to the wall between two cabinets in imitation-buhl. A very elegant safe it was, with a combination lock, secret drawers, and fire-proof compartments for bank-notes.

"The mischief of it is that this safe is empty," said Fougerey, with a laugh; "I haven't got my 'Ottoman' stock here—it is at Galipot's, and it is all I possess; but some day I shall fill this affair. Rheinthal is coming back, and meantime we will put the jewel-box inside, for this beautifully chiseled affair can't be anything but a jewel-box, especially as it does not weigh much."

This lively talk put Savinien on thorns, but the unlucky casket was at last shut up in a safe where M. Montauron would not find it, and the viscount took leave of George after thanking him. He longed to return home and find out what had happened during his absence.

VII.

It was the day when the race for the Grand Prize of Paris is run in the Bois de Boulogne. All Paris was at Longchamp—not merely the “*al. Paris*” that appears at the first performances of new plays, but artisan Paris and citizen Paris, the workshop and the studio, the Rue du Sentier and the Faubourg Saint Antoine. The city was deserted. The crowd had begun accumulating in the lower part of the Champs Elysées, and it extended to the sward in front of the race course. There were long lines of carriages starting from all directions and meeting at Longchamp; diminutive dog-carts brought chance “swells” from the extremest suburbs, and huge mail coaches, with well-matched horses, passed along filled with club-men, with glasses hanging about their necks, and racing-tickets swinging from their button holes.

Women, flashing meteor-like in their bright dresses, drove by in open carriages drawn by horses harnessed *à la* Daumont. The sun beamed upon the scene, and the macadamised road was dusty despite all the coming and going of the municipal watering carts. The long procession of vehicles ascending the Champs Elysées delighted the rows of loungers who sat on iron chairs, which are let out at a penny a piece. Here were any number of imitation fops and third-rate “irregulars,” interspersed with some of those respectable families who enjoy pleasure when it costs nothing; while here and there a few ruined racing-men tried to pass themselves off as *blasés* for whom the joys of the turf had no further temptation. There were foreigners everywhere. Every language except French was heard on the boulevard, and one was reminded of the mournful days of 1815 on hearing so many Russians with tapering moustaches, Germans with big whiskers, Englishmen with sandy hair, talking as fast as their tongues could wag. All Europe had flocked to Paris, and the new world also had its representatives in various skinny Yankees and swarthy Brazilians.

At Longchamp itself—over the vast expanse of turf facing the grandstands—an immense crowd of horses, carriages, and human beings was collected pell-mell, and the crush became greater every minute. Railroads and steamboats constantly brought new sight-seers from every direction. Pedestrians spread about over the empty spaces, gliding in between the vehicles, or grouping themselves near the ropes. Breaks, mail-coaches, and eight-spring landaus approached as near as they could to the winning-post. The stands were crowded, and the one reserved for ladies resembled a horticultural exhibition, such was the variety of colour of the dresses. The whole enclosure was crammed with people.

The sky, which the year before had rained torrents upon the throng, was now serene. The weather was admirably suited for the occasion. The horses would not have to run before a hundred thousand umbrellas as had happened in 1880, and it was not too warm.

Indeed the afternoon would be a perfect one if a French horse only won the famous prize, for patriotism never fails to rejoice in national success, and every victory over England at Longchamp is thought by the people of Paris to be a revenge for the defeat of Waterloo.

It is now three o'clock. The Armenonville and Ispahan prizes have been contested by way of enabling the impatient public to while away their time. In the front rank of the carriages, and in an excellent place for

watching the running, Mademoiselle Fourcas is seated in a superbly appointed barouche, drawn by two horses of mettle. Her uncle, obliged by custom to appear and watch over her, sits beside her. Somewhat further on, one may perceive the roomy landau belonging to the banker of the Avenue Ruysdaël. The body, wheels, horses, coachman and footmen shine like burnished gold. The whole affair is highly suggestive of millions of money. Madame Montauron is alone. Her husband has gone to stroll about the enclosure or elsewhere. She wears an upper skirt of black moire over an under one of black and white satin. This semi-mourning contrasts vividly with the splendour of her turn-out.

Still further on, lost among the carriages, and in the very midst of the clan of "irregulars," Anita's victoria is visible. The giddy actress is attired in blue satin, well suited to her blonde hair, upon which a hat with blue feathers is daintily perched. She is alone in the vehicle, but a crowd of friends of both sexes exchange greetings with her and surround her, to the envy of some women of the same appearance, who have a few imitation fops about them.

Inside the enclosure at the foot of the left hand stand Baron de Trémorin and his daughter are seated. The baron is dressed in good taste, in spite of the fact that he has not lived in Paris for thirty years. Yvonne wears a dress of navy-blue batiste, and a simple straw hat, trimmed with clusters of lilies of the valley, and she is charming to behold. Men of fashion, with flowers in their button-holes, pass and repass in front of her, and ask one another who she is, but the baron's presence prevents them from staring too fixedly at her. The old gentleman's appearance is extremely distinguished.

George Fougerey wanders about everywhere. He has risked bowing to Savinien's uncle, who returns a semi-bow. George is much too busy to notice this. He strolls backwards and forwards from the bookmakers' corner to the weighing room, trying to pick up information and make up his betting-book. Bouret also flutters about in all directions. He prefers, however, to be near some "old guards" of the irregular world who have come to bet, and are sufficiently well informed. They point out the horses that are likely to win, and he, in return, gives them tips concerning Bourse matters as they will be on the morrow.

Adhémar de Laffemas is perched upon the Jockey Club stand. He has bet a somewhat large sum on Corrigan, in the Ville de Paris handicap, and wishes to see the race. However, from the roof of the stand he catches sight of Mademoiselle Fourcas, and feels vexed at not being able to approach her. The noble marquis is, in point of fact, scarcely himself to-day, for his venture is a desperate one. If Scobell wins the great prize, Adhémar will be again afloat, but if he is beaten, Adhémar, like the gambler in Regnard's play, will have leisure to think of the adorable young girl whom he hopes to marry.

Count Aparanda has come to Longchamp on horseback, followed by a groom, and has galloped across the turf, and stationed himself near the last turn of the course, perhaps to avoid certain persons whom he does not care to meet. He has spoken to no one, but several people are aware of his presence.

Among the club-men and racing men in the enclosure one can espay various betting women, who have succeeded in getting in on the arm of an escort, for women are not allowed to enter the sanctuary unaccompanied. On French racecourses the backers always comprise a number of women of

all ranks of society. Some "irregulārs" of notoriety do not shrink from interviewing trainers and jockeys, to whom they make themselves amiable in hopes of wresting from them some of the secrets of the turf. Others do not go so far, but pick up information wherever they can get it, and are never better pleased than when they can obtain private hints from reliable sources as to the "good form" of a favourite, how he has eaten his oats or performed his trial gallop.

Among these feminine backers one must not forget the little Countess de Gravigny, whose passion for gambling even the Bourse fails to satisfy. She bets on all the races, for in the same way as she gets her tips about stocks and shares from a broker's clerk she derives private information as to horses and their merits from a groom employed by a well-known trainer. To-day the decisive battle will be fought. She has done nothing but lose money since the spring. She is in debt, and like Laffemas and others, she is threatened with an unpaid promissory note. She must win, or things will turn out badly for her. But she counts on winning. She is in the enclosure, and has been there since two o'clock; her husband having taken her and left her there. This gentleman never interferes with his wife's amusements, being of so accommodating a disposition. The countess knows everybody, and her tongue has plenty of practice.

She chats with M. de Boisguérin and with Glébof, who varies the conversation by recommending an "outsider" at fifty to one. She chats with the obliging "starter" who will give the signal. She chats with the groom of the horse that Fred Archer is to ride, and the young fellow tells her that the health both of the horse and the jockey has never been better.

At this moment she is not thinking of Madame Montauron, or of Mademoiselle Fourcas, any more than of the terrible Pinchard, who, however, is not far off, for he is conferring with a pale, thin bookmaker who is seated on a chair under a tree. He is whispering in his ear, and, is no doubt, interested in his money-making operations.

Not one of the persons with whom Savinien d'Amaulis has recently associated is absent from the great international gathering at Longchamp. But Savinien himself is not there, or at least he has not shown himself either to his friends or enemies, who all, without exception, particularly wish to see him.

His cousin, Adhémar, waited for him until two o'clock, to take him to the races in his phaeton, and finding that he did not appear, started off alone. The Marquis de Laffemas is greatly surprised by the viscount's failure to appear on the day of the Grand Prize, and is somewhat annoyed at his not keeping his appointment with him. Savinien, on his side, is greatly surprised that he has not met any of the people he has wished to meet for several days past. It is his own fault as regards Adhémar, but his cousin was not in mind. The persons he wished to see were M. de Trémorin and Madame Montauron, or at least Brigitte in the latter's place.

Setting aside the fact that his uncle had threatened to hold aloof from him until he made up his mind to confess everything, and not forgetting that the old nobleman, prior to the explanation at George Fougeray's, had invited him to breakfast with him on the morrow, Savinien had called at eleven o'clock in the morning at the restaurant of the Lion d'Or. The baron was not there, however. He had gone out with his daughter, and had informed the waiters at the Rue du Helder hotel that he would not be at home all day.

Sorrowful, but not discouraged, Savinien had returned to the hotel

every day, and indeed often twice in the course of twenty-four hours. Lovers are persistent. But he went to all this trouble in vain. M. de Trémorin was always out, and he invariably took Yvonne with him. It was evident that he had adopted stern measures as regards his nephew, who began to regret having so closely guarded the secret of the banker's wife. And, as an increase of misfortune, this unlucky secret began to weigh heavily upon the unfortunate viscount, who had not been able to advance one step in the matter, as he had not succeeded in obtaining from Madame Montauron a release from the engagement he had so lightly made.

After the fortunate removal of the casket which he had left with his friend George, the viscount had returned home empty-handed and light-hearted. He had found the doorkeeper walking up and down the sidewalk in front of the house in the Rue Rembrandt. It was evident that the man was not there for nothing. He was watching for his tenant's return, conformably with the landlord's orders. Evidently M. Montauron had called there, as Savinien had guessed, and taken upon himself the task of mounting guard at the palatial abode in the Avenue Ruysdaël.

However, Montauron's device did not enable him to ascertain anything of importance. His doorkeeper saw no parcel under M. d'Amaulis' arm, and the casket was much too large to be hidden in a pocket. So the banker only learnt that M. d'Amaulis had not brought it to his rooms. The danger of a visit, which would at once have occasioned a scene, was therefore avoided, but this was not enough to calm the viscount's mind, for the director of the Provincial Bank had undoubtedly questioned his clerks. He therefore knew that Savinien had called and removed a casket from the vaults, and he must more than ever be convinced that this casket was the property of his wife.

What would the jealous banker now do? It was impossible to guess. The only available course was to wait until something "turned up," and waiting was not to Savinien's taste. He longed to regain his liberty in order to re-acquire the good opinion of his uncle and his cousin. Madame Montauron alone could enable him to do this, and he hoped that she would speedily do so. However, the first day passed by without any message from her, and Savinien was greatly surprised at this. And neither on the morrow, nor on the day after, was there any sign of life. Still, Madame Montauron must have seen M. de Trémorin, and have spoken to him concerning the casket and her secret. So what was the meaning of this alarming silence? Was Madame Montauron watched? It indeed seemed as if this were the case; but, then, was Brigitte watched as well? She had a good excuse for coming to the Rue Rembrandt, as her sister lived in the house, and she knew that M. d'Amaulis was expecting her day after day.

What was he to do to acquaint the confidential servant with the fact that her mistress's diamonds had been deposited in George Fongeray's rooms, and that they were consequently at Madame Montauron's disposal, for her to keep them if she pleased, or to hand them over to Aparanda in exchange for her daughter?

Should Savinien write? He at first thought of so doing, but it was a measure full of danger. Jealousy respects nothing, and M. Montauron had perhaps reached that degree of exasperation when a gentleman loses all thought of delicacy, and goes so far as to open what may appear to him to be suspicious letters. Savinien did not dare to run this risk. He

preferred to see Madame Montauron openly. The idea was a very bold one, but there were some chances of success.

Accordingly, on the third day, at the hour when Madame Montauron was usually at home he went in visiting attire and rang at the main entrance, as he had done on the morrow of his arrival in Paris. But this time he was not admitted. The liveried footman who opened the gate informed him that the "baroness" was ill, and could not receive any one. The "baron" was also poorly, said the well-trained servant, so Savinien had to content himself with leaving his card.

He did not believe a word about this sudden illness, invented to enable M. Montauron to close his doors against his wife's friends, but he realised that it was a formal order, and that he should not succeed in forcing his way into the house.

He could not, however, remain on bad terms with his uncle until the perhaps far distant day when Madame Montauron would find a means of entering into communication with him; and, moreover, he was not disposed to renounce his dearest hopes in order to remain at the orders of this woman, who certainly did not deserve that Yvonne should be sacrificed to her. So he now determined to make a fresh effort to see M. de Trémorin. He wished to have a frank explanation with his uncle, to tell him fully what he had done, and ask him what Madame Montauron had said; and also to repudiate all further interest in her affairs, and beg his uncle to treat him like a son, as he had done before.

Nothing was apparently easier than to meet his uncle somewhere, however much he might go out. A man may often go out and stay away a long time, but he must needs be at home sometimes, especially when he has a young girl in his charge. Savinien soon found, however, that he was wrong in this calculation. M. de Trémorin continued to remain invisible. Savinien always came too soon or too late by five minutes. It seemed as though the imp of ill-luck had something to do with it, and the young fellow began to believe that his uncle must go in and out by the door that opened on the Chaussée d'Antin, that lucky door which Madame Montauron had made use of to escape from her husband.

He might have called upon M. de Trémorin at the hour of rising, or have waited for his return; but he feared a rough reception, as the baron was so irascible, and Savinien by angering him would have lost his last chance, for the old nobleman was not a man to restrain himself before his daughter, and Yvonne might thus hear things of which she ought to remain ignorant, under penalty of being wounded in the heart.

All that Viscount d'Amaulis could do was to accost his cousin's waiting-maid, a little peasant girl from Brittany, who wore a starched cap turned back at the sides, like those in use at Plouër, and ask her about her employers. He learned from this girl that M. de Trémorin spent all his time with his relations in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, dining sometimes with one, sometimes with another of them, and breakfasting no matter where, excepting at the Lion d'Or, although the latter had been his favourite restaurant.

This information was by no means calculated to set Savinien at his ease. He knew that one of his noble cousins had a mania for match-making, and he saw in imagination a procession of suitors parading before Yvonne. The peasant girl added, however, perhaps to console him, that "mademoiselle" was sad, and did not like Paris at all. At this, Savinien bade her tell her mistress that he called every day, and that he would not

tire of calling. But this was not enough to quiet the impatience which devoured him, and he finally decided to write to his uncle, begging him to fix a day and hour for seeing him.

The answer came prompt enough. It consisted of three lines:—"Madame Montauron did not receive me. I have nothing to tell you. When you make up your mind to tell me the truth let me know, and I will call on you for the purpose of hearing it."

This note was the finishing stroke, and it almost killed Savinien. He felt that all was lost, if he still persisted in remaining silent; and at all hazards Madame Montauron must be induced to authorise him to tell the truth.

In utter despair he began wandering, like a soul in pain, round about the banker's house, in the vague hope of meeting Brigitte or being seen by her mistress. He knew that Madame Montauron's rooms were on the first floor, facing the courtyard, and he hoped that she would see him from her window, guess his agonised state of mind, and find some means of ending his troubles. But it was in vain that he slowly strolled in front of the house, and walked about the Parc Monceau near the railing of Montauron's grounds, the banker's wife did not appear; she did not even raise a corner of the curtain, as she had done on the day when he had first called upon her husband.

He knew not what to do. But one Sunday, at about noon, as he was walking along the Avenue Ruysdaël, he observed some grooms harnessing horses to the eight-spring landau, the carriage only used on ceremonious occasions, and he conjectured that M. Montauron was going to Longchamp to witness the race for the Grand Prize. He also guessed that the financier would not go alone. He would not have brought out his best horses if Madame Montauron had not meant to accompany him. Now, Savinien had not forgotten the great race, and he blessed the unhopèd-for chance which at last offered itself of speaking to the banker's wife.

It seemed to him impossible that no occasion should offer itself during the whole afternoon, and he resolved, at least, to make an attempt to speak with her. But he also concluded that to be quite at liberty he had better dispense with the Marquis de Laffemas' company, and go to Longchamp in a cab.

He had some difficulty in finding one after breakfast, and it was already late when he alighted near the Tour du Moulin, and made his way into the enclosure. Something told him that he was not losing his time, and his heart beat fast as he walked towards the stands where all the aristocracy of Paris had congregated.

Savinien was no longer the young gentleman "from the country" freshly arrived from Brittany, who was astonished at every step he took. A sojourn of six weeks in Paris had sufficed to acclimate him in a city which is altogether unlike Rennes and still more unlike Plouër. He knew the Bois de Boulogne by heart, and the Allée des Poteaux had no secrets for him. But he had never been to the Longchamp races, and did not know which way to turn to find what he wanted. Before him stretched the immense sward covered with groups in motion, and isolated pedestrians sprinkled about like black spots over the green turf. On his left, beyond the enclosure, the verge of the wood was fringed with lookers-on, who had been there since morning, and had breakfasted together while waiting for the gratuitous exhibition. On his right innumerable carriages were drawn up ten rows deep, and beyond were the stands with their steps

covered with seated spectators, their roofs spangled with parasols of every hue, and looking like fields of ripe corn mingled with *bleuets* and poppies.

The eight-spring landau which had brought the Montaurons to Longchamp would certainly be found among the carriages, but how was Savinien to discover its whereabouts amid this thicket of vehicles? And how could he escape various meetings which he wished to avoid, while dodging about among the wheels and horses? How could he speak to the wife without being seen by the husband, and how was he to speak with her alone?

Savinien could only trust to chance, and hope that Providence would lead him straight to the banker's landau at a moment when Madame Montauron might find herself alone; and also that he would be spared an encounter with any one whom he wished to avoid.

His cousin Adhémar, no doubt, sat on the stand reserved to the Jockey Club or in the circle gathered in the weighing-room, and Savinien did not fear finding himself face to face with him, but where was the banker? Would he take sufficient interest in the races to mingle with the racing men, or would he content himself with looking on from his landau like a prince of finance, as he was, watching his wife all the while? Why had he brought his wife here, after watching her like this for several days with jealous care and closing his door against everybody, even against M. de Trémorin? The idea of displaying her in public, after such absolute seclusion, was unaccountable, unless it was that Madame Montauron had really been ill, and had come to Longchamp to acquaint Paris with her recovery.

Savinien willingly assumed that this hazardous supposition was well founded. One always believes what one wishes to believe. However, whatever might be the truth, he could hesitate no longer, and so he walked towards the immense gathering of carriages which stretched over the turf from the winning-post, past all the stands, to the turn where the horses reach the distance.

The viscount made his way over the course just as the preparations for running the Ville de Paris handicap were completed, and he fell into the midst of that crowd of pedestrians who pay a franc's entrance fee, and constitute what is known on the turf as the "rope public." They are a motley throng of loungers and backers for small amounts, who are neither remarkable for politeness nor for style. Several of these people had brought their wives and daughters to show them the horses sent from England expressly for the great race. They had purchased programmes and told their better-halves the names of the competitors, holding on to the rope at the same time, and always shutting their eyes when the horses dashed past them like a whirlwind. They never saw them afterwards, and never learned the winner's name till it had been half an hour in everybody else's mouth. But nothing would induce them either to let go or leave their places.

The backers for petty amounts were worse than the mere sightseers. They crowded together, jostled each other, and exchanged fisticuffs in their eagerness to secure places in the front row. When they succeeded they became still more outrageous—shouted, vociferated, howled, and yelled at the jockeys, gesticulating in such a manner that they often damaged the eyes of those near them. All these people formed so compact a mass that Savinien soon saw the impossibility of making his way through them. After a few idle attempts at gliding towards the carriages, he decided to

abandon the attempt in this direction and proceed lower down the course, while there was yet time. He did so, and the first vehicles he reached were those which had been the last to arrive—those which had come too late to secure good positions, and among them he did not discern one face known to him. The further he advanced along the outer line the less easy it became to penetrate through the labyrinth of carriage-springs. The mail-coaches often hid the lower vehicles, so that he might easily pass Madame Montauron's equipage without seeing her. It was, therefore, necessary to find out the best way to proceed, no matter what happened, and at last he succeeded, by bending down almost to the ground and passing under the shaft of a carriage, the horses of which spattered him with foam. The first obstacle once overcome, it became less difficult to move about, and he had chosen a good time for doing so.

The race which was just being run was of some importance, and everybody was on the look out. Women had risen from their seats and raised their opera-glasses to look at the ten horses engaged in the race, and which were galloping round the other side of the course.

Savinien, by dint of ferreting out a passage for himself, had gained ground, and ended by finding himself in the heart of the hubbub, in view of the stands and within a hundred yards of the starting-post. Madame Montauron must be somewhere in this direction. People worth millions always find good places everywhere, and the banker was not a man to occupy a back seat.

Savinien, more attentive than before, stood on tiptoe in his efforts to discern the familiar maroon and gold livery, which he would have recognised among a thousand. No one troubled about looking at him. The horses were coming up, and a confused clamour arose. For the time being, Viscount d'Amaulis saw nothing but people's backs in front of him, and, as he wished to profit by the moment when the spectators, the women especially, would turn round and show their faces, he ventured to step upon the footboard of a victoria occupied by a woman, to whom he did not pay any attention, although she was well worth looking at. It is true that at the moment she was standing up with an opera-glass to her eyes.

Savinien was not heavy, but his weight made the victoria oscillate. This was all that was needed for the woman to lay down her glass and turn round to see what individual was disturbing her equilibrium.

"What! is it you?" she exclaimed. "Now, it is very kind of you to come to me for a seat. I thought that we should be bad friends after that affair at the kiosk! But you have too much sense to bear a grudge against me, for you must have guessed that it was not my fault."

Viscount d'Amaulis alighted much quicker than he had mounted. His evil star had brought him to a person whom he had indeed no wish to see. Among so many vehicles he had been unlucky enough to light upon the well-known victoria of the well-known blonde, in a word, Anita the actress.

He naturally longed to beat a retreat, but how was this to be managed? He was fairly caught in a trap.

"Come up!" resumed the actress, beginning to use her glass once more. "I have five louis on Bouvreuil, and I want to see him win. The mischief! his jockey is hard at work on him, and Corrigan is ahead. Corrigan will win; yes, he is ahead, and that wretch, Bouret, told me just now that he was a broken-down horse! I might have had him at twenty, and Bouret wouldn't let me bet on him! That makes five louis gone! I'll make Bouret pay them back to me!"

Savinien did not listen to this speech. He was trying to find some excuse for going off, and was so much annoyed that he could not think of any.

"What is the matter, my dear fellow?" said Anita, seating herself again. "You look so cross at me! I think you do bear a grudge against me! Well, I declare that you are wrong if you do. I wasn't brought up on the lap of a duchess, but I know how to behave myself, and I'm not spiteful. If I had suspected that you were courting Mademoiselle Fourcas, and that you were an intimate friend of Madame Montauron, I shouldn't have stopped to poke fun at them, under pretext of buying some cigarettes, but I didn't know anything about all that, and, besides, I was asked to do it."

"By whom?" asked the viscount, interested in spite of himself by this preamble.

"By Aparanda, of course! you saw him yourself. I cannot imagine what grudge he has against the Montaurons, but he thinks of nothing but doing them harm. As they are friends of yours, you would do well to warn them against him. I am very sorry that I listened to him, the Swedish bear that he is! He made me quarrel with Colonel Cavaroc. I ought to have remembered all that I heard about the count. He is a mere adventurer, my dear fellow; I have found that out."

"But you still allow this Swede to visit you," replied Savinien.

"No, I don't! I sent him about his business. He is going to leave Paris to be hanged elsewhere, I suppose. He is going off to-morrow with the money he has cheated so many people out of."

"Are you sure of that?"

"He told me so just now, and had the audacity to come up to me to say it. But I beg of you to believe, my dear fellow, that I treated him as he deserved, and if I could only play him some good trick before he goes off I should only be too glad."

"What, did Count Aparanda tell you that he was going to leave Paris to-morrow? He is here, then?"

"Yes, he is here," replied Anita. "He never loses a chance of making any money. That man has got hold of some tricky bookmaker, and found some way of cheating backers, you may be sure of it. He has scandalous luck in betting, as he has in everything else. In the race just now he had twenty-five louis on Corrigan. I must do him the justice to say that he advised me to bet on him, but I wouldn't do it."

"I thought that you had nothing more to say to him?"

"Oh, I received him so badly that he will never come again. But I couldn't prevent him from alighting and coming to speak to me."

"Alighting? What do you mean?"

"He came on horseback, followed by a groom as badly mounted as he is, for you know that he has no horses. He lives in furnished rooms at the Grand Hôtel. At least so I learnt only lately."

"Has he left the race-course?"

"He? No fear! He must have some bets on the Grand Prize, and he won't leave till he gets his money. If you want to meet him, you have only to saunter up and down on the grass in front of the refreshment tent. He was galloping about just now over the field, and I presume that he has his reasons for not going into the enclosure."

"I have no desire to meet him."

"Then stay by me, my dear friend! He won't come near me. I

won't say, though, that he isn't prowling about Madame Montauron's landau."

"Madame Montauron's—— Have you seen her?"

"Certainly. Her husband too. Everybody has seen them. They came in great style, and their turn-out is the handsomest thing here. I am surprised that you have not seen it."

"I have only just come."

"And you came to see me first of all! Thank you, viscount. I'm not sure that you meant to come, but I'm glad that you are not angry; and as I'm not ungrateful, I will show you where the people are that you are looking for."

"I beg your pardon. I did not tell you that I was looking for any one."

"No, but I guessed it. You will find Madame Montauron a hundred steps from here. Her landau is near the ropes. She has not left it, and I think that she is alone, for when the horses started just now I saw her husband talking to a couple of brokers in front of the grand stand. He must be there still."

"The carriage is a hundred steps from here, you say?"

"Yes, on the right, going towards the winning-post. You can see it if you will step up on the seat of my victoria, when those spurious swells, who are in our way, make up their minds to alight from that break over there."

"I am very much obliged to you, but——"

"You would prefer not to be seen in my trap? As you please, my dear fellow, I don't mind that in the least, and as a proof of it, I will tell you something more, Mademoiselle Fourcas is a little further off, near the post, with an old gentleman who looks as though he might be an uncle or a guardian. He may be rather an annoyance, but he doesn't look very savage, and if you will listen to me—but no! you don't want my advice, and I see two young friends of mine over there who will tell me how matters stand as regards Dublin, my favourite in the Grand Prize. I have certain information that he will win if he only tries. You ought to bet twenty-five louis on him, my dear boy. That will make up for a part of what you lost to Aparanda."

Savinien, who was anxious to escape, muttered a few words of thanks, and yielded his place to some young men who were coming up.

After each race there is always some stir among the groups of carriages. The owners alight, the coachmen settle their harness, and bookmakers' messengers don't hesitate to take hold of the horses' bridles, and force the vehicles back, should they impede their passage.

Thus circulation, previously impossible, now became comparatively easy, and Viscount d'Amaulis took advantage of an opening to disappear behind an enormous mail-coach, which hid him from the insinuating Anita.

This giddy creature had rendered him an important service, as but for the information she had given him he might have spent the rest of the day looking for Madame Montauron without finding her, and thus have lost this opportunity of bringing matters to an issue. There was now not a moment to be lost if he wished to profit by the temporary absence of the husband.

Besides, Savinien was determined to speak to the wife, no matter what happened. After all, M. Montauron had only such complaints to make

against him as he must of necessity keep to himself, so he would hardly venture upon doing what in the days of chivalry was called: "breaking one's lance in one's adversary's visor," or, in other words, openly cutting or insulting the nephew of his friend, Baron de Trémorin. And if, as was unlikely, he ventured to express any anger on the race-course, if he broke out into reproach or abuse, the explanation which would result would be still less painful than the bitter uncertainty in which Viscount d'Amaulis had spent the last few days. It was better to quarrel with Montauron than to be at variance with Yvonne's father. Besides, the young fellow hoped to reach the landau before the financier's return, and in this he succeeded. After wandering in and out among the carriages, keeping always to the right, and approaching nearer and nearer to the winning-post, he finally discerned the black dress and pallid face of Madame Montauron. She was alone in her carriage, but the coachman had not left his seat on the box, and the footmen stood within call, that is to say, much too near to the vehicle to suit Savinien.

There was no time, however, for hesitation, for time was precious, and, besides, Madame Montauron had caught sight of him and made a sign to him to come near her. She appeared calm enough, although a deep blush rose to her cheeks. Nothing gave evidence of recent illness. Savinien came forward, hat in hand, and the discreet footmen, being well trained, withdrew to a short distance. The way was free, and he took advantage of it to go straight to his object.

"At last I can speak with you," said he in a whisper, but affecting the half-smiling and ceremonious manner which a well-bred man assumes when he bows to a lady, a manner calculated to deceive any lackeys who may be about.

"I thought that you had abandoned me," said Madame Montauron dejectedly and in a low voice.

"I abandon you! I who——"

"Every one has deserted me. I have not seen your uncle for five days."

"My uncle! he wrote to me that he had called on you and that you would not receive him."

"Is that really true?"

"I swear to you, madame, that it is so, and I add and affirm that I myself have tried to communicate with you. I looked for a letter from you or a visit from Brigitte."

"Brigitte fell on the stairs and hurt herself seriously. She cannot walk yet, and I cannot trust any one but her. All the other servants are under my husband's orders. I am closely watched, and you have just shown me that I am sequestered, as my friends are prevented from coming near me."

"You have not been ill, then?"

"I have been dying with grief and anxiety, that is all," replied Madame Montauron, bitterly.

"You need not die," said Savinien. "I have the casket."

"Since when?"

"Since the day after your charity fair. I succeeded in carrying it off without being caught by Monsieur Montauron, but my uncle has seen it. He was in Monsieur Montauron's office, and ill-luck would have it that he met me as I was leaving the bank: I tried to avoid him, but he followed me. I took refuge at the house of one of my friends. He pressed me with

questions, and demanded an explanation of my behaviour ; asked what the casket contained ; what I was going to do with it——”

“And you told him ?” exclaimed Madame Montauron.

“No, madame. I have kept the secret which you have confided to me, and it has cost me dear. My uncle has closed his doors to me.”

“Why ? What does he accuse you of ?”

“Of carrying on a suspicious intrigue, of having deceived him and his daughter, whom I love to distraction. He thinks that I have some love-letters from a woman in the casket.”

“And you did not justify yourself ?”

“Could I do so ? It would have been necessary to have told him everything.”

There was a moment's silence. Madame Montauron looked fixedly at Savinien, who did not avoid her eyes.

“Then,” said she, at last, “he does not know to whom this casket belongs ?”

“I think, on the contrary, that he feels sure that it belongs to you. Certain questions addressed to him by Monsieur Montauron have put him upon the scent. I denied it, however, whereupon he replied that he would go to you and demand a full explanation, and I admit that I did not attempt to dissuade him, as I have no hope except in you. My uncle will not forgive me till my innocence is proved, and you alone can prove it. It depends upon you whether I shall be the happiest or the most wretched of men.”

“What do you mean ?” asked Madame Montauron, in a voice full of deep emotion.

“I am surprised, madame, that you do not guess,” replied Savinien, quickly. “If I were only threatened with the loss of my uncle's regard and protection I might resign myself, although I love him as though he were my father ; but I must renounce the hope of marrying my cousin, for Monsieur de Trémorin will never allow his daughter to marry a man whom he accuses of carrying on an intrigue.”

“This marriage had been decided upon, had it not ?”

“It had, in point of fact. If my uncle had not intended that I should marry Yvonne he would not have sent me away from Plouër. He contented himself with sending me to spend a few months in Paris as a kind of trial. I might have shortened this unlucky trial, and if I had had my own way I should have long ago returned to Brittany. But you know what detained me here. Astonished, no doubt, at the long intervals between my letters, my uncle came here without letting me know about it, and informed me at once that he meant to wait a whole year in Paris, to bring his daughter out in society, and give her a chance to know her own mind.”

“You have nothing to fear ; she thinks of no one but you, for she loves you, I am sure of it.”

“She loved me once,” said Savinien, sadly, “but will she continue to love me if her father tells her that I have betrayed her for another ?”

“He will not do that ; it would be an unworthy act.”

“He will do it, madame, and I cannot complain, for he will only be doing what any other man would do in his place. What father would not in such a case warn his daughter ?”

“But he knows that the accusation against you merely rests upon appearances. He must know that you love Yvonne.”

"You are mistaken, madame. Since he questioned me concerning the casket, and I refused to reply, he feels sure that I am guilty. Do you think that he would refuse to see me if he were not? For several days past I have been trying to meet him without succeeding. He has given orders not to admit me. I am nothing more than a stranger to him now. My only hope is in you. I hope that you will see him, and that he will speak to you as he alone is in a position to do."

"See him! I was awaiting him with impatience."

"Here is his letter," said the viscount, drawing M. de Trémorin's brief note from his pocket-book."

Madame Montauron glanced over it, and her eyes filled with tears. "Thus," said she, in a husky voice, "it is not enough that I should suffer, but you also, who have sacrificed yourself for my sake, you must be made to suffer as to your dearest hopes. You did well to show me that letter; your uncle would not lie. He must have called and I was not told of it, but he will call again, and then——"

"He will not call again," replied Savinien d'Amaulis, shaking his head; "he feels wounded, and is too proud to subject himself to a fresh affront. Besides, Monsieur Montauron, who ordered his servants not to admit him, will not allow him to see you. It is evident that your husband has resolved to isolate you, and I am surprised that he should have brought you here."

"I did not wish to come. But he earnestly begged me to come here with him. We had scarcely driven up when he left me alone. He pretends to treat me as though nothing had occurred. The watchfulness of which I complain is not openly exercised. I feel but I do not see it. What you have told me shows me that my servants tell people that I am too ill to see any one. I cannot think why he has brought me here. Perhaps he has guessed that I might see you."

"Who knows if this is not a trap, and whether he is not watching us now from afar? Perhaps he wishes to have some pretext for asking for explanations which he has not yet ventured to demand. He may mean to question me as to the casket. He will make a mistake if he does so, for I shall tell him nothing. I would not tell him anything after refusing to answer my uncle, and certainly I will never betray you, but your situation will be very painful and mine also."

"Yours!" repeated Madame Montauron, with grief. "Yes, I see it now! You have sacrificed yourself for me, and it remains for me to restore to you both the esteem of your uncle and the love of your betrothed. Monsieur de Trémorin shall know all."

"Then you free me from my promise," cried Savinien, "you authorise me to tell him——"

"That it is I who am guilty," interrupted Madame Montauron; "it is for me to tell him that, and I will tell him although I may die with shame. Your uncle, who was a father to me, will perhaps forgive me for not having in former days made a full confession to him. I wished to tell him everything, but Madame de Morvieux advised me to conceal the existence of my daughter, and I made the mistake of listening to her. If I had followed my own impulses I might have prevented great misfortunes which cannot now be averted; but, at least, I will atone for the harm which I have done you. Take me to Monsieur de Trémorin!"

"Take you to him? Where? To your own house? He would not be admitted, and you forget that he refuses to receive me."

"He would not prevent you from speaking to him here."

"Is he here?"

"Yes, with his daughter. I saw him a moment ago when we came up to the gate near the mill. He was in a cab, which did not drive on to the race-course. I think that he did not see us, for he did not bow, and I do not know where he is seated, but you will probably find him near one of the stands. Tell him that I wish to speak to him immediately, and let him understand that I wish to exonerate you. He will come."

"Ah, you bring me back to life!" said Savinien, who was greatly moved. "If only my uncle doesn't accuse me, it matters little that others may suspect. I am still willing to serve you. Dispose of me."

"Thank you, sir. I did not expect less of you, but I will not abuse your devotion. I am going to ask Monsieur de Trémorin to do what you were ready to do. You must give him the diamonds, so that he may treat with this man."

"In order to give the diamonds to my uncle I must have the key of the casket."

"I have it with me, and will give it to him. It is better that he should open the casket himself; he will then be quite sure that he has been mistaken as regards you."

"Yes, you are right, it would be better: but do you think that he will consent——"

"To save me?" interrupted Madame Montauron. "Me, the daughter of his dearest friend? I do not doubt it. But there is not a moment to be lost. My husband may return."

"And in forty-eight hours from this time Count Aparanda will have left Paris. He so informed that woman whom he ventured to bring to your fair."

"He is at the races, then?" said Madame Montauron, who had gradually calmed herself.

"Yes, and he told her he should remain here till the end."

"Your uncle might speak with him to-day. In the name of the girl you love, find Monsieur de Trémorin and persuade him to come to me immediately. Bring him up to my carriage. The Grand Prize is about to be run. Profit by the confusion that prevails before the race to cross the course. Monsieur de Trémorin, being with his daughter, must be on the stands somewhere. You will have time to bring him here before the horses start, and I am sure that my husband will stay at the enclosure till the preliminary canter is over; he said so, at all events."

Savinien was about to offer an objection which occurred to him, but Madame Montauron did not allow him to speak. "There is Monsieur Bouret coming up now," said she, hastily. "I can get rid of him, but you may not be able to do so. Go, sir, go, I beg of you! My life is in your hands!"

Savinien was anxious above everything to avoid the under-manager of the Provincial Bank. He made haste to bow and disappear among the carriages so as to hide from Bouret, who was coming from the circle formed by the bookmakers.

The imprudent viscount felt himself relieved from a great weight now that the woman whom he had defended had promised to tell M. de Trémorin the whole truth; but he greatly feared that he would not be able to bring him to her there. It would first of all be necessary to join him, and this was no easy matter. Besides, Madame Montauron, in the plan

she had formed, had quite overlooked the fact that Yvonne had not remained at the Rue du Helder hotel. It seemed very unlikely that the nobleman would consent to leave her with Savinien, and, on the other hand, he could not take her with him as the conversation would be such as she ought not to hear.

However, the first thing to do was to find M. de Trémorin, and tell him in a few words that the banker's wife was waiting for him to confide her secret to him. The viscount acted accordingly. He saw the stands, and thought that his uncle must be there. In order to reach them it was only necessary to get through the crowd on the course.

After a few turns, which hid him from the inquisitive gaze of M. Bouret, he succeeded in finding a free passage, and was emerging from the labyrinth of vehicles when he had the misfortune to pass close to an open carriage where Mademoiselle Fourcas was seated near her uncle.

She turned at the moment when he brushed against it, and it was necessary for him to bow; he even felt that this was not enough, for she looked fixedly at him so as to compel him to speak, and he uttered, with some difficulty, a few commonplace words of a polite nature which did not require any reply. However, he was not destined to escape so easily.

"Viscount," said M. Fourcas to him with an air of importance, "the Marquis de Laffemas is looking for you everywhere. He was with us a moment ago, and will return; and if you wish to see him you had better wait for him here."

"But, uncle," said Mademoiselle Fourcas, with a constrained smile, "Monsieur d'Amaulis would no doubt prefer to have a chair over there near Monsieur de Trémorin and his daughter."

"That is true, mademoiselle," replied Savinien, "I was looking for my uncle."

"You could see him from here if the track were not so crowded," said the young girl, and she added:

"Mademoiselle de Trémorin is wearing a very simple style of dress which suits her to perfection."

"My niece would be very happy to offer her a place in our carriage," resumed the uncle, "and I should be most happy to become acquainted with Baron de Trémorin. Is he not, like yourself, viscount, related to the Marquis de Laffemas, whom we are expecting?"

The pompous citizen evidently liked to gargle his throat with these high-sounding titles, and he articulated them with so much emphasis that Savinien could not avoid smiling as he unaffectedly replied: "Adhémars is my cousin on the father's side, his great-great-grandmother was an Amaulis. Monsieur de Trémorin, who is my mother's brother, is not related to Monsieur de Laffemas."

"But he knows him, and would not be sorry to meet the marquis."

"Certainly not, but——"

"Excuse me, uncle," interrupted Mademoiselle Fourcas, "I think that Monsieur de Trémorin has no wish to disturb himself, and that Monsieur d'Amaulis is very anxious to go to him. It is useless for you to persist in detaining him."

This was a formal dismissal from the heiress, which Savinien did not mistake, and he was grateful to her for setting him free. He longed to reach the stands while the passage was still free, and to speak with his uncle. So he profited by this chance to depart; and to cross the course he had only to turn round a huge mail-coach which had driven up near

the starting-post, and occupied more space than three ordinary carriages. Scarcely, however, had Savinien passed this last obstacle when he found himself face to face with his cousin Adhémar, who was coming in the opposite direction, and who cried out, throwing up his arms: "What! You here! I thought you must be ill. Did you know, my dear boy, that I waited for you till two o'clock."

"You must excuse me," stammered Savinien, "an unforeseen impediment arose."

"Oh, I'm not vexed about it! You made me miss the first race, but I made up for it on the second and third. Corrigan and Alphonsine came in ahead. The day has begun well, and I hope it will end better still. I have utilised all my winnings and spare cash in backing Scobell, and I have a neat little sum staked, so that between now and the next half hour I shall have made up for all my losses this year."

"I am delighted, but——"

"By-the-by, you know that you are down for thirty-five louis?"

"Why, how is that?"

"On Scobell. Ten that I bet for you last month, and twenty-five that I have just staked. I don't forget my friends, even when they forget me!"

"I am greatly obliged to you, but if you had consulted me——"

"You wouldn't have made the bet, and you wouldn't pocket the three hundred louis which you will win in spite of yourself! I had the horse at six, and now he's at four. You can thank me after the races are over. Try not to worry yourself in the meantime. I should like to be with you at the moment of triumph, but—you will never guess where I am going now?"

"Yes, I know it. You are going to see Monsieur Fourcas and his charming niece."

"Ah! you went over to them, and they told you that they expected me."

"The uncle told me so."

"Oh, I recognise his style! If he could paint my name on his carriage, he would do so. But it's the truth. I promised not to leave them while the Grand Prize was being run. The worthy old man will ask me the names of the horses, the names of the jockeys, and all about their owners. Ah! as you may well imagine, I would rather stay in the weighing-room or go up on the club-stand. But what can I do? Mademoiselle Fourcas is adorable——"

"And she has a dowry of five millions! I wish with all my heart that she may bring them to you, my dear cousin, and I do not want to detain you. Besides, I am looking for my uncle."

"Monsieur de Trémorin? Of course, you are! I will show him to you. Look! do you see? Over there! on the stand, to the left."

Savinien looked and joyfully recognised the baron, who was seated on the opposite side of the course.

"He is with his daughter, whom I think very pretty, and who will be very rich," added the marquis. "I congratulate you, my dear boy, and you have my best wishes. It is my turn to say: 'Don't let me detain you!' I should, indeed, advise you not to lose a moment, for the crowd is being driven back. The horses are about to start, and you won't be able to cross if you defer matters."

"That is true. I have only just time; good-bye."

"Ah, now that I think of it, I must tell you something that isn't very

agreeable, but which won't surprise you very much, for I told you the other day at the charity fair that it was going wrong——"

"What is going wrong?"

"Well, my dear fellow, after consulting some of my intimates, I made up my mind to withdraw my application for your admission to the Jockey Club."

"Oh, if that is all——"

"You don't care, and you are right, the more so as you will have better luck another time. I acted wisely. You would have had twenty black balls; but next year every one will have forgotten that you ever belonged to the Plungers."

"No! no! I beg of you not to trouble yourself any more about me," said the viscount, who really felt more annoyed than he looked.

"As you please," replied M. de Laffemas. "Next year you will find consolation, if, as I hope, you marry your cousin. Meantime, do come to see us oftener. Even my mother complains of your absence."

The two cousins separated, shaking hands, and Savinien ran towards the course, but reached the barrier too late to cross. The crowd, driven back by police officers, swarmed in the direction of the carriages, and formed an obstacle which the viscount could not overcome.

He tried to resist the rush; he even endeavoured to pass despite all prohibition, but came against a resolute officer, and was obliged to beat a retreat. It was now necessary to return beyond the barrier and remain amid the throng. It was impossible to stir, or even to see, as he was no longer in the front row. His uncle and cousin had disappeared behind a crowd of sightseers who formed a screen in front of them. He could not hope that this screen would part, for the horses were leaving the paddock, and the police were driving away all the people who, having tried to cross too late, still wandered about the course.

Poor Savinien inwardly anathematised Adhémar de Laffemas, who had stopped him at such an inopportune moment, and tried to make up for lost time. He soon saw that there was no way of doing so, and that he must have patience till the end of the run. He had not even the satisfaction of following the phases of the struggle, on which his cousin had, without consulting him, betted in his name, and he was thinking how he might get out of the hubbub, when among the people around him a backward move was made. A gentleman was being jostled about to prevent him from passing, but he moved his elbows so energetically that he at length succeeded in getting through, and emerged from the throng in such a way as almost to fall into the viscount's arms. Savinien received him in a friendly manner, for he recognised George Fougerey, his old school-fellow.

"Where did you come from?" he asked, unthinkingly.

"From the weighing-room, of course!" replied George, "and I thought that I should never reach the club-coach. The police pushed me from behind, and these idiots here pushed me in front with their fists. I came near going down, but never mind, here I am! And you, what are you doing here? It is a lucky thing that I came across you, for I am almost inclined to believe that you are keeping out of my way. I haven't set eyes on you since you brought me that jewel-box, which you ought to take back."

"I will take it back to-morrow, or perhaps to-night."

"To-night, my dear boy, I shall not be at home. I shall be at the ball at Mabilly, to conform to custom, for you know that on Grand Prize day

everybody goes to Mabille in the evening. I shan't miss doing so, for I shall be making a holiday of it on account of Albion's victory."

"Albion's victory?" repeated Savinien, who had not looked at the programme.

"Yes. Where did you come from to ask that? Albion will win. Albion is going to set me afloat again, and I have no wish to lose the lovely sight of his galloping up to the post in front of all the others. I shall climb on to our mail-coach. Come, if you like, there's a place up there. But let us make haste."

Savinien was about to refuse, but he soon remembered that the best thing he could do was to secure a position whence he might observe his uncle and Madame Montauron, who were much more in his mind than the races.

"Where is the mail-coach?" he asked.

"There, behind you!" called out George. "Come quick if you wish to get a place. In another moment we shall be crowded. The whole Plungers' Club is here."

Savinien followed his friend and climbed on to the huge vehicle, which already served as a point of vantage for a large party of clubmen.

"We are here at last!" cried Fougerey, "and I shall see how my luck will turn out! Ah! I won't deny that I'm nervous. Anybody would be. My bet on Albion is my last shot."

"Your last shot! How is that?" asked Savinien, anxiously.

"Certainly," replied George, with a careless air. "Didn't I tell you the other day that my Ottomans had turned out badly? The note which Pinchard holds is due on Wednesday, and I all the more wish to be ready, from the fact that I know how you are fixed. Nothing in your cash-box, nothing at the bank, and determined not to ask anything of your uncle. I cannot rely on you, and so I have bet all I possess on Albion, who is sure to win."

"But if he loses——"

"That is impossible," interrupted George. "Albion is the best horse out, and, besides, is in perfect condition. I have just seen him saddled. Round about the paddock every one said: 'There's the winner!'"

"My cousin Adhémar de Laffemas just told me the same thing about Scobell."

"Scobell! He's broken-winded, my dear boy! The trip has knocked him up. He has hardly been able to stand since he arrived in France. He will not even be placed."

"But Adhémar ought to know. He is very well informed."

"Well informed? What stuff! Because he belongs to the Jockey he imagines that he knows more than other people. That is a great mistake, my dear fellow. I'll bet that your noble cousin has some dust in his eyes, and will find himself up a tree."

"So much the worse," coldly replied Savinien, who did not like slang.

"Why so much the worse? Don't I tell you that I have bet on Albion?"

"I know you have, but it appears that I have thirty-five louis on Scobell."

"Don't you know whether you have or not!"

"Adhémar bets for me."

"That is a pretty idea of his! You will lose your thirty-five louis, But I shall make two thousand, and our note won't be protested."

"So be it," muttered Savinien, who felt no confidence in the prediction.

"There are such strange people in the world, upon my honour!" resumed George, who was growing gradually quite excited. "They bet on a horse which has no chance at all, and they expect everybody to think as they do. Your cousin Laffemas needn't have made an absurd bet in your name. All that is mere conceit. He believed in Scobell at the beginning of the season, and he won't give in. It is just the same with that little goose of a Countess de Gravigny, whom I just met in the enclosure. She has bet on Tristan, and talks of nothing but Tristan. Any one would think, to hear her, that there is nothing in the world equal to the Chamant stud, and that Archer's mount settled everything as to the result. She will soon see, however, what good it does to work up one's imagination on 'private information,' and as she is in Pinchard's clutches, there'll be a fine time of it! I really wonder what her husband will say when they bring him her note of hand."

"Wait till after the race. No one here believes in the same animals."

"Do as I do. Look at the horses. They are coming out."

"I see them, and I won't talk to you any more. One word only. Did you meet Montauron in the enclosure?"

"I should think that I did. He stays there all the time. I don't know why, but I imagine that he didn't go there to stare at the horses. He had two gentlemen with him, who didn't in the least look like racing-men."

"Bankers, perhaps?"

"I don't know; I never saw them at the Bourse."

"That is odd."

"Yes, for Montauron usually keeps with his own set. But what do you care about it? Let me follow Albion, who has begun his canter. Admirable, my dear boy! Wonderful! I would not give my bet for fifteen hundred louis!"

Savinien paid no further attention to what was going on upon the course. He was looking out for those who interested him, and from the point of vantage he occupied he had no trouble in finding out where they were.

Mademoiselle Fourcas was quite near by, and he need not have lost a single gesture had he been disposed to watch her and the Marquis de Laffemas, who, having posted himself in front of her carriage, kept up a very animated dialogue both with her uncle and herself. Further on, Viscount d'Amaulis saw Madame Montauron, and he observed with satisfaction that she was still alone. Her husband had remained in the enclosure, and, to all appearance, intended to stay there till the winner's number went up.

At the foot of the stand, on the left hand side in the enclosure, M. de Trémorin, who was standing, with his daughter seated beside him, did not appear to take much interest in the coming contest. The baron looked absently at the horses which were coming up to the starting-post, but Yvonne gazed vacantly before her, and her pallor showed how much she had suffered.

Savinien would have been glad if she had caught sight of him, but he did not venture to attract her attention by gesticulating, which would have been of no avail, for amid the crush of carriages and spectators it was very difficult to recognise any one at a distance.

"There are ten competitors," said George, whose mind was entirely

taken up with the race. "Look! there's Albion now! he is the sixth, between Scobell and Tristan. Isn't he in good form, my favourite, eh? Goater, who mounts him, won't have to touch him with the whip, I'll answer for it. There's the starter arranging them. They're off! No, they have stopped and gone back. It's a false start! My dear boy, you may believe me or not, but I have not a dry thread on me. Three francs fall on stock would not affect me like this."

"But if it was your 'Ottoman' stock it might," said Savinien.

"Ah! at last! the flag's lowered! this start is a good one! You'll see how Goater will manage the business!"

"Goater is Albion's jockey, isn't he?"

"What a question! I told you so just now."

"But he seems to be behind, or nearly the last."

"Of course! He is not such a fool as to tire his horse out at the first; he is holding him back, and has as much as he can do to accomplish it."

"What horses are ahead?"

"Tristan and Foxhall the American horse. Let them go! They won't come round again in the same order."

"But they have passed the mill, and they are still ahead."

"Yes, and Dublin is second, the wretched, broken-down beast. That proves that the start is of no importance."

"Dublin is Anita's horse. She must be as anxious as you are. But the American horse is still ahead."

"Wait! wait! they have come to the opening near the wood! Foxhall, then Dublin, then Fiddler! The best of them isn't worth much."

"Then the good horses are always behind, according to you."

"No, not exactly. Albion is already fifth; he is advancing more and more."

"That's strange! I thought that he was quite behind."

"You don't understand; but look at Scobell—your cousin's horse! He is last now."

"My thirty-five louis seem to be in peril."

"Ah! they have passed the second turn, now we shall see."

"Which are the horses coming on first?"

"Albion, my dear boy! Albion for ever! The other is Tristan, whom there is no reason to dread, and Dublin weakens—he's done for!"

"The American horse does not weaken, on the contrary."

"Yes, yes, it isn't he who's ahead!"

Savinien did not feel disposed to discuss any further the chances of a contest which a few seconds would decide, so he said no more. The horses were now galloping between the two turnings, and the decisive moment was near at hand. A confused clamour began to rise from the immense concourse of people. A thousand voices howled out the names of the horses, each backer calling out that of his favourite steed, and those that had bets on the lagging horses were not those who shouted the least. It was, perhaps, a way of forgetting their defeat.

"They are reaching the distance," said Savinien. "I do not see Scobell at all."

"He is out of the running, and has been for ever so long," grumbled George.

"Yes, but where is Albion?"

"Can't you see?" replied George, in a tone of vexation. "Albion is so easy to see. He gets nearer and nearer."

"That may be," muttered Savinien, "but just now there are two ahead of him, and it seems to me that Tristan is the most forward one of the couple."

George did not reply, but began to gesticulate like a madman, and shouted: "Albion! Albion!"

The final struggle was about to begin. The horses had passed the last turning, and were making their final effort to reach the goal.

Savinien d'Amaulis had seen clearly. Albion was third, and even behind the two foremost horses by several lengths. Foxhall, the American horse, on whom neither George Fougeray nor Adh  mar de Laffemas, the Countess de Gravigny, nor even Anita, had bet—Foxhall had recovered the start which he had momentarily lost. Tristan was approaching on his right, and galloping beside him; his jockey, Fred Archer, who had so far not urged him, now beginning to apply both spurs and whip.

It was the decisive moment, and it seemed as though Tristan, skilfully ridden, would make a final effort and win the race. Indeed, Savinien, who had ended by becoming somewhat excited, wished that Tristan might win, as Albion was out of the running.

But, alas! Tristan did not reply either to the spur or whip, and Foxhall, who had gained half a head, kept in front till the finish. The horses came up so close to one another that there was a moment's hesitation, but No. 13 was presently run up, and the name of Foxhall shouted out by thousands of voices. Flags with stars and stripes fluttered at once from several of the carriages. For the first time since the Grand Prize of Paris had been run, America had achieved a victory at Longchamp.

Tristan, the countess's favourite, had been honourably vanquished, but the unfortunate horse on which George had bet was three lengths behind the two first, and Scobell was ignominiously distanced.

Savinien had lost thirty-five louis, since his cousin was out in his reckoning, but this was nothing compared to what Albion's defeat might cost him. He looked at George, and the face of his imprudent friend promised nothing agreeable. "Well!" said he, anxiously.

"We are beaten," replied Fougeray, in a hoarse voice "Luck is against me in everything, and the best thing that I can do is to drown myself."

"You are not speaking seriously, I hope?"

"No, my death wouldn't help the matter, and I wish to recover my note at any cost. We still have two days before us. I shall try to turn them to account."

"Had we not better go and see Pinchard? He might perhaps consent to renew, as he promised. I will tell him of my situation, and appeal to his good faith."

"You might as well appeal to a bear. Pinchard has no bowels of compassion, and thinks nothing of breaking his word."

"I suppose not, but by offering him to double the interest——"

"Nothing would do any good," interrupted George, "unless you could bring him your uncle's name as security."

"That is impossible, as you know very well."

"Then you have no resource whatever—no money, no valuables, no credit?"

"No—a thousand times no! And I might ask you this question, as it is you alone who owe this sum. I haven't kept a hundredth part of a franc since I gave you back the two thousand francs which you advanced me,"

"That is true, but you need not remind me of it," said George, somewhat sharply. "If I ask you to help me out of the difficulty I am in it is because in three months' time I shall be in a position to pay, and the only thing is to gain time. I thought that as you owned a good-sized bit of land you might find a notary here who would consent to advance the money on your promise of a mortgage, I know one who does such things without taking much time for inquiries. A telegram to the registrar of mortgages in your district to be sure that there is no mortgage ahead, and—"

"No, no!" interrupted Savinien; "I am already on bad enough terms with my uncle. I don't wish to make him more angry than he is."

"Bad enough terms? Oh yes, about the casket! I'll be hanged if I can understand a word about that matter. I only thought that if that box contains any valuable jewels, as I believe it does, you might pawn them to save us from a protest."

"Who told you that there were jewels in the box?"

"It isn't difficult to guess that from the form and weight of the casket. Yesterday, in changing its place in my safe, I shook it, and I heard a dull sound. Your casket must be full of diamonds."

"What of that? You must know very well that they don't belong to me, and I suppose that you will scarcely advise me to use another person's property."

"No, assuredly not; if I thought of what I just suggested it was because I supposed that they were yours. But let us say no more, and allow me to leave you. I have nothing further to do here, and I have no time to lose looking about me before the fifteenth. All is perhaps not lost. I will see Galipot. I will try what I can at the Bourse to-morrow or the day after. In a word, I will do all I can."

And, without awaiting his friend's reply, George slipped down the side of the mail-coach very dexterously. It was already deserted by the other members of the Plungers' Club, who had gone to look up their friends to talk over the somewhat unexpected result of the great contest.

Savinien remained alone on the roof of the vehicle, and his attention, diverted for a moment by the disappointment which would probably embarrass him to an unheard-of degree, was again fixed upon the carriages and the stands.

The aspect of affairs had changed in the twinkling of an eye. The crowd gathered behind the barrier during the race had scattered like a torrent over the course and among the equipages. The refreshment-stand was besieged by people who had come to drink in honour of their victory, or to console themselves for their defeat with glasses of champagne, which they disputed for. The open space in front of the stands was thronged. The conqueror, the winning horse, had just come up, preceded by police-officers, his bridle held by his trainer, and behind him flocked a compact mass of backers, who were shouting at the pitch of their voice. It was only then that the final decision was given, for if the jockey was not up to weight the result would be annulled, and the second horse would carry the day.

Tristan's partisans, urged on by a dying hope, pressed about the weighing-stand, and anxiously followed the wavering of the needle.

But a loud "all right!" articulated by the bookmakers' messenger, announced that Foxhall was the winner, and trainers and owners re-

treated under the "mushroom," where, in the shade, the incidents of the race and the bets were being discussed. In the midst of this disorder, and owing to this disbanding on all sides, it was difficult for Savinien, who had not left his point of vantage, to see the persons who chiefly interested him.

Most of the spectators having left their places, the land-marks were lost. Only confused clusters were discerned here and there. Carriages were surrounded by news-bearers, who obligingly described the race to the ladies. On the stands there was a bewildering confusion, as in the figures of a cotillon. Blue and red parasols darted about here and there. Everybody was coming and going, mounting or descending. And Savinien was forced to confess that he had lost sight of his uncle and cousin. While he was bestowing the reverse of a blessing upon the temporary excitement which had diverted his attention to the race, he asked himself what he could now do to find M. de Trémorin again. Nothing proved that he had not left Longchamp to return to Paris; for the two races which remained on the card did not constitute the main attraction of the day. The baron cared very little for sport, and if he had appeared at all, it had been for Yvonne's amusement and not to bet.

Savinien, in great distress, turned to look at Madame Montauron, and he succeeded, though not without difficulty, in perceiving the spot where her carriage was stationed among hundreds of others. No one was seated beside her, but the landau was surrounded by people whom Viscount d'Amaulis did not know, or, at all events, whom he did not recognise at the distance at which he found himself.

Nearer, and almost immediately below him, stood Julia Fourcas' open carriage, about to drive away, and from which the Marquis de Laffemas showed no signs of alighting. Over the grass a rider was coming towards the carriages ranged five deep in an endless row, and at sight of him Viscount d'Amaulis started.

"It is that wretch Aparanda," he muttered. "He appears to be looking for some one."

Urged on by anxiety, Savinien now alighted, scarcely knowing which direction he had better take. His main purpose was to find his uncle, and yet he hesitated about doing so till Count Aparanda went off, for the Swede's manner of acting alarmed him. He lost sight of him for a moment, but at last he perceived that the count had begun to walk his horse, and was rising in his stirrups so as to take in at a glance the various rows of carriages.

"He has evidently some evil purpose," said Viscount d'Amaulis to himself, "and if he is looking for any one it can only be for Madame Montauron. If he sees her, he is capable of making a scene, for he is reckless as to consequences, since he intends leaving to-morrow or the day after. Heaven knows what would happen if the husband should come back while he is speaking to her. My duty is to prevent the rascal from going to the carriage. When he knows that the unfortunate woman whom he is persecuting accepts his conditions, he will disappear readily enough, and as soon as I have done with him, I will go into the enclosure and search until I find my uncle."

The first impulse is said to be always the best, and Savinien, who believed this, did not dismiss the generous idea which had abruptly come to his mind. Instead of crossing the course, he turned to the right, and reached Count Aparanda as the latter was alighting and giving the reins to

his groom. It was indeed time for Madame Montauron's champion to interfere.

Savinien hastened forward and spoke to the Swede without the least hesitation. Since the stormy interview which he had had with Count Aparanda at the Plungers' Club, he had never conversed with him. When he had met him in the Allée des Poteaux, the few words exchanged had no relation to Madame Montauron, and when he had seen him at the charity fair in the banker's park, he had not spoken to him at all. As war had been declared between them a month previously, it was out of place to think of polite preliminaries now.

"Where are you going, sir?" asked Viscount d'Amaulis, placing himself resolutely in front of Aparanda.

His appearance was altogether unlooked for by the Swede, who was not, however, disconcerted by it.

"What does that matter to you?" he replied. "Do you wish to pick a quarrel with me?"

"A quarrel! What good would that do? I know very well that you are not a man to fight. I told you what I thought of you in the Bois de Boulogne, and I have waited in vain for your seconds since then."

"It does not suit me to fight about the woman whom I was with then. I have nothing further to say to you; let me pass on."

"To go and insult Madame Montauron? Isn't that your intention?"

"No sir; I must speak with her. I am about to leave Paris, and I absolutely need to see her before I start."

"You shall *not* see her. You can say all that you want to say to her to me. She has authorised me to answer you. What have you to say?"

"What have I to say? you know that very well, as this isn't the first time that she has sent you to me. At the club, when you made me certain proposals, I replied by specifying conditions which you did not accept, and we parted without being able to come to terms. It is probable that we shall not agree any better to-day. It is for that reason I wish to speak to Madame Montauron herself. This attempt at a reconciliation will be the last, and it is probable that it will not succeed. However, I don't wish that Madame Montauron should be able to reproach me for not applying direct to her. If she does not see her daughter again the fault will not be mine."

Savinien remained for a moment without speaking. He was abashed by the impudence of this scoundrel, who spoke of a vile bargain as though it had been the most natural thing in the world, and he longed to treat him as he deserved. But he also realised that to break off negotiations with him would be to blast Madame Montauron's last hope, at a moment when it might, perhaps, be realised. Aparanda was about to disappear for ever with the child. There could be no further doubt of that, and it depended upon Savinien to prevent it, and detain him by telling him that the unhappy mother was ready to buy her daughter from him for the price of her diamonds. The great point was to prevent his departure. M. de Trémorin would accomplish the rest.

"You are mistaken," said the viscount, scornfully. "It rests with you to receive the price you demand. I am authorised to tell you so, and I am able to prove it."

"That changes the matter," replied the foreigner at once. "Then Madame Montauron is ready to give me the two hundred thousand francs if I give her——"

"Two hundred thousand francs, or her diamonds, which are worth more," interrupted the viscount.

"But which she cannot dispose of as they are, so you yourself told me, in a casket which you unluckily deposited at the Provincial Bank, and which you dare not take away."

"I have taken it away."

"Then it is in your rooms?" asked Count Aparanda, with strange eagerness.

"No, sir," coldly replied Savinien, "it is not in my rooms, and I——"

"If you gave it back to Madame Montauron you did wrong," interrupted the count, "for it may fall into the hands of her husband, who suspects the truth, and must be watching her."

"I did not give it to Madame Montauron; I have confided it to one of my friends."

"Is your friend a safe man?"

"Perfectly so. You know him. It is Monsieur Fougeray."

"That is different. I am easy, then, and we can treat together. But, before anything else, I must tell you that I insist upon seeing the diamonds."

"You shall see them."

"Very well. But who will be charged with selling them? You or me?"

"Neither you nor me. You will have to deal with some one who will have full power to regulate the conditions of the exchange. It will be an exchange; do not forget that. You will not receive the sum till you give back the child, and the letters which, you say, are in the huge chest deposited by you at the Provincial Bank."

"It is understood, on one condition."

"What is that?"

"I wish, first of all, to know the name of the person who will act as Madame Montauron's representative?"

"What does the name matter to you?"

"It matters greatly. I am not disposed to treat with the first person who presents himself, and take him into the secret of my private affairs."

"I did not know that you had such scruples. You told me all about these matters during the first conversation that I ever had with you."

"That is true; but I did not tell you anything that you did not already know. You were perfectly aware of the truth. It does not suit me to tell it to any one else."

"Even although that person might know it already?"

"That depends upon circumstances," replied the Swede, after a moment's thought. "If the person whom you send to me suits me, I shall not refuse to accept him as an intermediary; but he may not suit me, and if not, I withdraw. It is therefore better, so as to avoid useless trouble, that I should know his name now."

Savinien was silent. He hesitated to name his uncle before making sure that he would undertake the delicate mission with which Madame Montauron wished to charge him.

"Observe that it will be necessary to come to this," resumed Aparanda. "And also remember that I have no time to lose. I wish that all shall be terminated in forty-eight hours. If I thought that the matter would take longer, I would go away from Paris now."

"Well, then," replied Viscount d'Amaulis, "it is probable that you will be obliged to treat with Baron de Trémorin."

"I thought so. That had to be ! Monsieur de Trémorin is your uncle, and I suppose that Madame Montauron has no secrets from the friend who formerly arranged her marriage."

"I don't see what reason you can bring forward for not treating with Monsieur de Trémorin. You know him, and he has long known you."

"It is precisely on account of that that the choice of him seems very strange to me. He knew a good many things, but I don't think he knew all, and if Madame Montauron appoints him to represent her, I shall not be able to conceal anything from him, as I must give up the child to him."

"Don't trouble yourself as to that. It is enough if you agree to the interview with my uncle."

"I agree to it. Where will it take place ?"

"I cannot tell you now. I must first see Madame Montauron, who will come to an understanding on this point with Monsieur de Trémorin. When this is done I will write to you."

"At the club, if you please. I will call there to-night."

"It isn't certain that I shall be able to make the appointment for to-day."

"So be it, then ! I will go to-morrow to the club, and inquire if there is a letter for me. I will even return in the afternoon, but that will be all. I cannot hold myself indefinitely at your disposal."

"Very well ; but you can make ready to finish matters promptly—that is to say, to give up Madame Montauron's daughter immediately."

"Immediately ? That would be difficult. I told you before that the child is in the country near Paris, but I will find a means."

"Nothing prevents your bringing the letters with you. You have only to take them to-morrow morning from the chest where you say you have concealed them."

"Oh ! I don't wish to leave them there in any case. Rely on me : I will do all I can to end matters at once. The diamonds are with your friend Fougeray. It is probably at his rooms that I shall see Monsieur de Trémorin."

"I cannot say," replied Savinien, stiffly. "My uncle will decide that."

"By the bye," said the Swede, with affected indifference, "does Monsieur Fougeray know what the casket which you have left in his hands contains ?"

"Why do you ask that ?" retorted Viscount d'Amaulis.

"Because, if your friend Fougeray is in the secret of Madame Montauron's affairs, it would be just as well for me to treat with him," replied Count Aparanda. "The fewer persons there are concerned in the matter the better."

"Madame Montauron will do as she pleases about that, and she did not tell me to ask your advice as to the choice of her representative. I can tell you, besides, that Monsieur Fougeray does not know one single word of this story, and that he has not seen the diamonds, for the casket has never been opened in his presence, and he does not possess the key."

"He must know that it contains valuables."

"What of that ? Do you assume that he might be capable of abusing a trust ?"

"No, certainly not. Monsieur Fougeray is hard pushed, I am told, but that is no reason why he should commit a dishonest act."

"Say no more, then ! This conversation has lasted quite long enough !"

"I have no more desire to prolong it than you have. Why should I

since we agree? I have only to await your letter, and I will wait till Tuesday morning."

"You will receive it to-morrow, and I rely upon your abstaining from any steps as regards Madame Montauron herself."

"Oh! now I don't need to see her. And to prove to you that I have no intention of speaking to her here, I will go back to Paris at once. I have had a very successful day, for I have won all my bets so far, and I have not backed any horses in the two races now about to be run. Good day, it isn't probable that we shall meet again."

"I sincerely hope not," muttered Savinien.

Count Aparanda did not appear to hear him. He turned on his heel, and directed his steps to the spot where the groom was holding his restive horse.

Savinien was greatly pleased to see him mount and gallop off. He followed him with his eyes as far as the barrier of the race ground, and even until he had disappeared along the wide, dusty route which leads from Longchamp Hippodrome to the Porte Maillot. Then, re-assured as to the chances of this dangerous enemy's return, Baron de Trémorin's nephew thought only of finding his uncle. And, in truth, it was urgent that he should do so, for he had, as the saying goes, "sold the bearskin before he had slain the bear." He had made a promise to Count Aparanda without knowing how M. de Trémorin would take the matter, or even knowing whether that difficult old gentleman would either consent to hear what he had to say, or to see Madame Montauron; and, should he miss him on the race-course, he might lose a chance that would not again occur.

The excitement which Foxhall's victory had caused had not yet subsided. The vast crowd was flowing forth on every side; it had invaded the course and the space in front of the stands; it had scattered among the vehicles. All classes of spectators were pell-mell together. Members of the Jockey Club were talking to damsels seated in hired victorias, and women of the best society were speaking to bookmakers in a friendly manner about settling day. In the midst of the general confusion Savinien did not know which way to direct his steps, or where to look for those he wished to find. When he had been perched upon the roof of the mail-coach he could have seen in all directions, and he had a mind to return there, but, after a little reflection, he now thought it best to look for Madame Montauron's landau.

It was necessary to inform her of the arrangements into which he had entered with Aparanda. These were conditional, since he had not yet obtained M. de Trémorin's consent, but Madame Montauron might be able to do so. It was for her to ask for it, even if it were necessary, in order to accomplish her purpose, to write a note on the ground, a note which Savinien would take to the Rue du Helder hotel; or in lieu of that she might go with Viscount d'Amaulis to Paris to await the baron's return there.

The question was whether the persons who, an hour before, had been gathered round her carriage were still there, and especially whether her husband had returned from his excursion to the enclosure or elsewhere. Let this be as it might, it was the moment, or never, to try and speak to her.

Savinien threw himself into the midst of the throng. Stealing along so as to avoid Mademoiselle Fourças' barouche and Anita's victoria, he

crept as best he could among the carriages, horses, and men, and by dint of dodging and elbowing at length came in sight of the vehicle in which he had left the banker's wife.

The circle which had been formed around the landau some time before no longer barred the way to Madame Montauron's truest friend. The gentlemen whom Savinien had seen from the roof of the mail-coach had scattered one by one. However, the lady was not alone. One talker remained, whom the viscount recognised from afar, although he only saw his back. This was M. Bouret, who, after buzzing about among "the irregulars," had now seen fit to come and speak to his partner's wife. It might be seen by his gestures that he was endeavouring to be very entertaining, and from her face that he was not successful. Savinien took in the situation at a glance. He would greatly have preferred not to meet this inevitable bore, but he resolved to approach the carriage all the same.

It was evident that Bouret was not there for his own pleasure, but was going through a performance which duty required of him, and that he would be only too glad to be released from an unpleasant task, and yield his place to a new-comer. Savinien had now no choice in the matter, for M. Montauron might appear at any moment. He therefore made up his mind and walked straight to the carriage.

Madame Montauron was not surprised at seeing him return without M. de Trémorin, and M. Bouret welcomed him warmly. "What! viscount! is it you?" he cried. "I was looking everywhere for you, and I couldn't find you at all."

"Monsieur d'Amaulis was probably on the stand with his uncle," said Madame Montauron.

She saw in Savinien's face that something had upset the plan they had made, and she only mentioned the uncle in order to give the nephew an opportunity of explaining his mishap.

"No, madame," he replied, "I could not find him."

"Monsieur de Trémorin?" said Bouret. "You were too late; he has gone."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Perfectly sure. Just now I was behind the stands, and I saw him with my own eyes get into a cab with his daughter, one of those little open victorias which strangers hire when they go to see the Paris sights. I bowed to him, and the worthy baron must have been in a hurry to return home, for he did not take time to return my bow."

Viscount d'Amaulis and Madame Montauron exchanged a glance.

"That is what it is to live in the country," said the under-manager.

"Monsieur de Trémorin, who is one of our greatest capitalists, takes a cab by the day like a mere village notary. I mentioned this eccentric way of acting to Montauron, and he could not get over it."

"Have you seen my husband?" asked the banker's wife.

"Yes, madame. He is in the enclosure, and does not seem to think of leaving it. He is walking about there with some gentlemen who are unknown to me and who do nothing but come and go—'racing men' I suppose, trainers, perhaps, as they don't look very stylish. Perhaps he is questioning them, which would surprise me greatly, as it is the first time that my dear partner ever bothered his head about the races. Shall I send him to you, madame? I am just going to see what are the odds about Fataliste in the Prix Vaublanc, which they are going to run, and Montauron must be near the bookmakers now."

"Thank you, sir, don't give yourself that trouble. I shall remain till the end. And, since you have your own interests to look after, I will not detain you. If I make up my mind to look for my husband Monsieur d'Amaulis will be kind enough as to offer me his arm."

"Then I shall have no scruple in taking advantage of the permission you so graciously give me," replied Bouret, with a touch of sarcasm. And he went off, after bowing with the utmost politeness.

"Speak, sir! What has happened?" demanded Madame Montauron, as soon as she found herself alone with Viscount d'Amaulis. "Has your uncle refused to come?"

"No, madame," replied Savinien, shaking his head. "I could not get near him. I was prevented from crossing the race-course. He has now left, and if I go to his hotel he will not receive me. There is but one way of seeing him. You must go to Paris; he will see *you*. I will procure a cab."

"Can you think of such a thing? How can I do so? It would be the same as to confess to my husband that——"

"You can find some excuse this evening for having gone," interrupted Savinien. "Say that you were suddenly indisposed, or whatever you like, but I swear to you, madame, there is not a moment to be lost. Aparanda has just told me that he will not wait any later than to-morrow. I told him that my uncle would see him, and he is ready to treat with him. After to-morrow it will be too late."

Madame Montauron turned pale but did not hesitate. "Call one of my footmen," said she to Savinien, and then, as the servant came up she added: "François, if Monsieur Montauron comes back before I do, say that I have gone to take some refreshments with Viscount d'Amaulis."

VIII.

THE rooms which M. de Trémorin occupied in the Rue du Helder were not in the same part of the hotel as those where Savinien d'Amaulis had spent so eventful a week.

The nephew had contented himself on his arrival with two rooms on the third floor overlooking the courtyard; the uncle, however, engaged a complete suite with a parlour, dining-room, two bed-rooms, with a dressing-room to each, besides an additional apartment without any special use, and of which he had made a smoking-room. The peasant girl who waited upon Yvonne de Trémorin lodged upstairs.

Whatever M. Bouret's views on the matter might be, the baron knew how to do things handsomely, and although he had taken a cab to go to the races, it was solely because he had not yet had time to set up any sort of establishment; for he was not avaricious, and intended to live in good style in Paris.

He even thought of buying some furniture, as he meant to remain in the capital for a whole year, but this plan was not to the taste of his daughter, who did all she could to dissuade him from it; however, the baron was very obstinate when he made up his mind to anything. Poor Yvonne grew sadder and sadder. All her dreams of happiness were fading away one by one. She despaired of ever seeing Plouër or Savinien again, for M. de Trémorin for several days past had been very strict in his orders that his nephew should not be admitted. Yvonne spent hours

in solitude and tears, and it was all that she could do to refrain from weeping when she went out with her father, who began to give her but little rest. There was nothing all the time but visiting, introductions to strangers, and dining in town; just so many annoyances to Yvonne, who did not like anything but life in the open air, and took no pleasure in showing herself in fine dresses in the ceremonious drawing-rooms of her relations of the aristocratic faubourg. She was neither coquettish nor vain, and the compliments paid to her beauty and intelligence did not console her for being deprived of the dear companion of her childhood, her beloved Savinien, whom M. de Trémorin persisted in banishing, without clearly explaining his reasons for doing so.

On the morning of the Grand Prize of Paris Yvonne had been agreeably surprised when her father had proposed to take her to Longchamp, not because she cared to see the races, but because something told her that Savinien would be there, and she thought that he would find some means of approaching his uncle on this neutral ground. From that to making peace there would be but a step. She believed this, be it as it might, for she did not admit that Savinien could really be in the wrong. This day, however, which was to end in a painful disappointment, had brought nothing but sorrow to Yvonne. She had just returned, heavy-hearted, to the rooms where her cousin was not admitted, and instead of trying on one of her new dresses, she seated herself in a melancholy attitude at the end of the smoking-room, which her father only entered when he wished to indulge in a cigar after breakfast.

She had placed some books there, and an album filled with photographs, which she often opened to look at Savinien's portrait. M. de Trémorin, coming in, found her contemplating this likeness, which did not fill the place of the original, but which unceasingly brought him before her, and he could not restrain his annoyance at the sight.

"I find you at that foolishness again," said he angrily; "you will never give over conjuring up your recollections of the past! It is really too childish, and that young man doesn't deserve that you should trouble your head about him. Besides, it is five o'clock, and we have to dine with Madame de Loudinières. You have just time enough to get ready. Jeanette is waiting for you, and I wish you to look well. Our cousin has invited all her friends to do you honour. You must make a good impression, and not look like a little country-girl."

"I don't wish to please any one," murmured Yvonne.

"You may as well say that you wish to vex me," replied M. de Trémorin, who was becoming more and more irritated. "You are aware that I wish you to marry, and that Madame de Loudinières is on the lookout for a suitable match for you. Let me tell you, since you still pout, that she has found a very charming young man for you, who will be at her house this evening, and will be introduced to you."

"Not this evening, father, for I am really ill, and shall not go out."

"Ah! is that what you say? You are foolishly in love with your cousin, and you imagine that you can marry him in spite of me. Well, then! you oblige me to tell you some things which I wished to spare you."

"What has he done, father?" demanded Yvonne, with anguish in her heart.

"I would rather not tell you, but I must do so, for it will cure you of a foolish infatuation. I should not be forced to it, however, if you had any common sense left. Haven't you any eyes? Didn't you see him during

the races perched upon the roof of a mail-coach, among a disreputable set of fellows! Do you think that he wouldn't have come to chat with us if he didn't feel that he does not deserve to be spoken to, and that he no longer belongs to us?"

"But, father," said Yvonne, "when we saw him on the roof of the coach the Grand Prize was about to be run, and the course had just been cleared. He couldn't pass. If the course had been free he would have come to us."

"He ought to have come earlier, then, or later," grumbled M. de Trémorin.

"Earlier! You forget, father, that he did not know where we were. I am certain that he must have been looking for us for a long time when he saw us from the roof of the mail-coach. How could he guess that you had tickets for the enclosure instead of being in a carriage on the other side of the course? He has not seen us for nearly a week now. You have closed your doors to him."

"I have no intention of opening them again. I have been told that he has been prowling about this hotel under pretext of inquiring for me. This persecution must cease, or I will know why, and that very soon."

"The 'persecution' you speak of clearly shows that if he did not speak to you at Longchamp it wasn't his fault. The course was scarcely clear when you took me away. If we had not returned to Paris so hastily he would have found us."

"That is precisely what I wished to avoid."

"Then don't accuse him of neglect. He is perhaps looking for us at this very moment."

"Well, let him look! It will do him good."

"You are very harsh as regards him," murmured the young girl, in a husky voice.

"You make me too angry altogether," said M. de Trémorin on hearing this. "I tell you, once for all, that this young man is leading a most reprehensible life, and that he associates with very improper people, and is compromising himself by very objectionable conduct. Don't force me to say more."

"Objectionable conduct?"

"I use these words rather than plainer ones. If I gave you a full account of his conduct, you would confess that I behave rightly in breaking off with him. It wasn't pleasant for me to do so, and I hoped that he would clear himself, but he hasn't."

"You would not listen to him."

"It would do no good. Besides, if I refused to listen to him, I didn't prevent him from explaining matters by letter, and he has taken good care not to do that. I received a note from him merely asking me to receive him. I declined. It would have been an idle interview, as he did not agree to tell the whole truth. And besides, this young gentleman, my nephew, has gone back to the bad set that compromised him. He is the intimate friend of a good-for-nothing speculator, named Fougeray, whom he never leaves. They came to the races together."

"There is nothing to show that they did. Monsieur Fougeray was his school-fellow at the law-school at Rennes. Savinien can't turn his back on him in Paris; but there is a long way between that and being his intimate friend. If he were his friend I should know it."

"You imagine, then, that your cousin hides nothing from you? You

are really too simple-minded for your age, and if I spoke out I should reveal a nice story. That Savinien of yours tells you just what he chooses. I'll venture to say that he never told you that he had won and lost a hundred thousand francs, and spent a year's income in a month, without counting that he has a lot of debts? I fully expect to see the name of Amaulis in the hands of some lawyer soon, and Heaven grant that his disgrace may go no further than that!"

"If he has any debts he will pay them," answered Yvonne, with remarkable decision of tone. "How do you suppose that he could avoid having some debts? You forced him to come to Paris against his will, and you told him to plunge into society the temptations of which he did not realise. Doesn't his want of experience excuse his faults?"

"Really, mademoiselle," exclaimed M. de Trémorin, half laughing and half angry, "I did not know that you could be so eloquent! You ought to be a lawyer. But you are defending a bad cause, and your special pleading won't induce me to acquit a guilty man. Believe me, my dear Yvonne, Savinien is acting very badly towards me and towards you, which is still worse. He says that he loves you; he thinks, perhaps, that he does love you, but he acts as though you were nothing at all to him."

"What do you mean?" asked Yvonne, turning very pale.

"You must not expect me to speak out. There are certain subjects which a father cannot mention to a daughter."

"Why not? If Savinien has deceived me for some other woman, isn't it better that I should know it? I beg of you not to leave me in doubt, which is more cruel than the worst certainty."

"The certainty will only come too soon."

"You are not sure as yet, then?" exclaimed Yvonne.

M. de Trémorin bit his lip. He began to see that he would not be the winner in this discussion with a girl to whom sincere love, despite her youth, suggested unforeseen arguments, and he didn't wish to go any further in his communications.

"And so," she resumed "you suspect Savinien, and on the strength of mere suspicion you condemn him."

"Listen to me, my dear Yvonne," said M. de Trémorin, gently, "I don't wish to deceive you, and I admit that I haven't any absolute proof that Savinien has deceived you."

"Ah! I knew it very well!" exclaimed the young girl.

"It cost me a great deal to have to believe him guilty. But appearances are very much against him, and so much so, that I have every reason to believe that he is not a fit husband for you. Let it be as it may, it is my duty as a father to take what I know into account, for your happiness is at stake. What would you think of me if I allowed you to engage yourself for your lifetime to a man who might be bound by other ties, illicit, even criminal ties?"

"It is impossible! You forget that Savinien has, so to speak, always been with us. When you sent him to study at Rennes he went there against his will, and as long as he stayed there he never allowed a month to elapse without coming to see us at Plouër, and indeed, he often came twice in a month. It was his greatest delight and his only pleasure."

"It isn't his stay at Rennes that I am talking about."

"Then it must be in Paris that—but no, father, he has been here six weeks, and in every letter he has expressed a desire to return to the

château; he would, indeed, have done so if we had not made this unfortunate trip."

"Unfortunate is a strong term," said the baron half smiling. "I myself don't in the least regret having come here. I have learned things which I should never have known otherwise, and I am probably not at the end of my discoveries. These discoveries greatly concern your future, and I am determined to carry them to the end. Now, my dear daughter, I am going to speak openly to you, and when I have spoken, without shocking you or compromising a fellow about whom you need no longer trouble yourself, I will make you judge of the situation. Savinien d'Amaulis is the son of my well-beloved sister, who left him to me when she died. I have always treated him as though he had been my own son. I have taken care of him from his earliest childhood, and have never ceased to feel the tenderest affection for him, and until recent times I always thought that he deserved it."

Yvonne started, but said nothing. It was easy to see from her manner that she had made up her mind to hear all.

"Why shouldn't I admit," said M. de Trémorin, "that having thought over all the reasons for and against this marriage, I resolved to subject your mutual attachment to a final test? If Savinien proved unworthy I spared both of you bitter regret. However, I now come to the most trying part of the explanation as to what has occurred, and I beg of you to listen to me attentively. Chance has shown me that Savinien is mixed up in an intrigue in which a woman plays the principal part. Of that I have positive proof, and he does not deny it. How has he become mixed up in this affair? I asked him that, and while protesting his innocence he refused to give a clear and lucid explanation. He declared that the secret was not his own, and that he was not free to tell it to me even for his own justification."

"Wasn't he, as a gentleman, called upon to do that?"

"Perhaps so, but the matter is complicated by a circumstance which shows me that he did not speak truly. He begged me to see the lady herself, and he said that she would tell me what he could not explain. I must tell you that I not only know this lady, but I am on such terms with her that she could speak plainly to me. I went to her house, and this lady, who had always been on the most friendly footing with me, refused to see me. Her servants said that she was ill, and I know for a fact that she is quite well."

"Is it on the strength of that circumstance alone that you accuse Savinien of falsehood?"

M. de Trémorin was about to make a sharp rejoinder to this abrupt question, which wounded his pride as a father, when Jeannette, the maid, came in with an air of embarrassment.

"There is a lady, sir," she stammered, "a lady who wishes to speak to you."

"Did you ask her name?"

"Yes, sir."

"And she would not give it, I suppose! Send her away. It must be some adventuress or other."

"She told me that her name was Madame Montauron."

"Madame Montauron?" exclaimed M. de Trémorin, rising hastily. "That is impossible! You must be mistaken! Is she tall, with a pale complexion and black eyes? Is she alone?"

"Yes, sir, but I think some one is waiting for her down stairs, for she seemed to be in a hurry, and there is a cab in the street at the hotel door."

"Usher her into the parlour, and tell her that I will come to her," replied M. de Trémorin, after striding up and down the room for a moment, watched with intense anxiety by Yvonne.

"Does this visit annoy you, papa? I thought that you were Madame Montauron's oldest and best friend. We have not seen her for some days, and it is quite natural that she should call on us."

"Her coming to see me relates to an important matter, and I must see her at once."

"Will you allow me to go with you to receive her?"

"No! You must stay in this room. Don't leave it on any account until I come to you. Madame Montauron, no doubt, wishes to speak to me of things which are not meant for you to hear."

"Am I never to know what all this means?" asked Yvonne, eagerly.

"Try to calm yourself in my absence," answered the baron, "for when I come back I shall be obliged to speak plainly, and you will be forced to listen." With these words, M. de Trémorin, leaving Yvonne to her own reflections, crossed the dining-room and entered the sitting-room.

The young girl had not guessed everything that there was reason to suppose, but she felt that her fate was about to be decided; her father had told her enough to prove that Madame Montauron was going to speak to him about Savinien, and she hoped that the innocence of the viscount would now be clearly established. How the banker's wife came to be mixed up in the matter, and what part she played in it, Yvonne scarcely dared to think, but she felt sure that Savinien was quite blameless.

"If I could but see him," she thought, "he would tell me all. I am sure that he loves me, and me alone. His lips told me so when he left Plouër, and his eyes have told me the same since we met again here, and neither can have spoken falsely."

At this moment a slight rustle made her turn her head—Savinien stood before her.

"You!" she exclaimed, rising and going quickly towards him. "My heart was not in error. I knew that you would come!"

Savinien took both of Yvonne's hands in his, and, kissing her brow, said in a voice choked by his tears: "I have suffered deeply!"

"So have I, but you have come at last! All our sorrows will be at an end. You will see my father?"

"Your father does not know that I am here. I came in without saying what room I was looking for, or I shouldn't have been allowed to come up. Jeannette had orders not to admit me. However, I spoke to her in such a way that she let me come in, and I do not intend to conceal myself from my uncle. I shall not go away without seeing him; but I wished first of all to speak to you."

"My father has gone to receive Madame Montauron."

"It was I who brought her here."

"Alone?"

"Yes, alone. Fortunately, her husband was not with her when I met her at the races. She has come at the risk of seriously compromising herself, of ruining herself, perhaps, to explain everything."

"Then it was to her that my father alluded when he told me——"

"What has he told you? Things that a young girl ought not to know? No—that is impossible!"

"He told me that you had refused to give up a woman's secret, and I said that I approved of your course. He said nothing more, except that you had deceived me."

"You did not believe that?"

"Not for a moment; but to listen to him——"

"You would think me guilty? He believes me so, or he would not behave as he does towards me, or accuse me of a fault of which I am not guilty."

"Why should he pretend to be so angry with you if he isn't really so? He admitted just now that he had intended to allow us to marry, but he said that his ideas on the subject had changed."

"Yes, a few days ago; and if you knew, Yvonne, upon what he founds this change—proofs that are not proofs, which he has not seriously inquired into, or allowed me to show him the absurdity of. Madame Montauron, who could have convinced him that he was in the wrong, has been prevented from seeing him, and he supposed that she was trying to avoid him. But as soon as she knew to what trials I was subjected for refusing to break a promise I had made to her, she did not hesitate to come here, and I brought her with me at once. She will tell my uncle everything, and then he will be unable to continue keeping me away."

While Savinien was thus speaking, Yvonne's paleness betrayed her emotion, and it was easy to see that she was not so much at ease as he was. She did not dare to ask any further questions, for her woman's instinct warned her to avoid venturing upon delicate ground.

"Do you doubt me?" exclaimed Savinien, surprised and troubled by her silence.

"No," she murmured, "I have faith in you, and I do not fear the decision which my father will arrive at when he knows everything. He alone has a right to speak now, and I do not ask to know more. But should he persist in his present determination, I wish to say to you that I shall never marry any one but you."

"I should die of grief if he forbade our marriage! I love you with my whole soul, Yvonne, and I am still worthy of your love, although I have done wrong——"

"Wrong!" repeated the young girl, trembling.

"Yes, and I must tell you in what. When I came to Paris I allowed myself to mix with people whom I ought to have fled from. I can in one word say that they were repugnant to me."

"But why did you frequent such people as the associates of George Fougerey when you had the blessed medal which I gave you still about your neck? It was given to me by a naval officer, a friend of father's, who brought it from the Holy Land. You have lost it, no doubt?"

"Lost it! It is here upon my heart. Look!" exclaimed the lover, drawing a silken cord from under his waistcoat. The medal hung from it, and his gesture in drawing it forth had been so eager, so impassioned, and yet so unaffected, that the young girl blushed with joy.

"Will you believe me," said Savinien, warmly, "when I tell you that not a day has passed since I left you when I have not kissed it ten times with thoughts of you?"

"Even on the days when Monsieur Fougerey took you into the bad company he enjoys so much?" said Yvonne, smiling.

"Yes, and it was this talisman which prevented any evil from befalling me among these worthless companions."

"Is it true that it protected you? My father says that it did not."

"Your father is mistaken? I had no great merit in resisting temptations that were not temptations."

"Was the woman who came so strangely dressed to the fair, and who was at the races to-day, one of these persons?"

"Yes. Since I have sworn to hide nothing from you—and I have sworn so to myself—I must confess that I once accompanied George Fougeray to a card-party at her house, at which I lost a large sum of money, but it was paid with what I had made at the Bourse; how, I will tell you at some future time."

"My father declares that you have impaired your fortune."

"He is wrong. I am no richer than when I left Plouër, but I am no poorer, or not much."

"He says that you have debts."

"No. None of my own exist, but it is true that I am responsible for another person, and that if he does not pay I shall be forced to do so in his place. I have made a great mistake, but I had not the courage to refuse a friend."

"George Fougeray, was it not?"

"He was in a pitiable plight. He absolutely needed a certain amount, and could not obtain a loan on his own signature. He asked me to lend him my name."

"And you did so? That was like just you!"

"Then you do not blame me for having saved my schoolfellow?"

"No, if he is an upright man, and, since you have not broken off with him, I believe him to be so."

"A man may be upright and yet be poor. George thought that he would be able to meet the note. The resources upon which he relied have failed him, and the person who holds the bill will come to me."

"When?"

"On the fifteenth of June, which is Wednesday next. In three days, as this is Sunday, I shall be asked to pay forty-three thousand francs!"

"Ah, what a sum!—almost a fortune! What will you do?"

"I shall borrow some money on my farm at Trigavon."

"If my father finds that out, he will say that you are on the road to ruin."

"If he says that, he will only say what is true. When I have paid the money-lender, I shall barely have enough to live on."

"What does that matter, as I shall be your wife?" said Yvonne with the utmost simplicity.

"You talk like a child, as you are. In the first place it is not certain that my uncle will give his consent to our marriage, and if I fancied that he thought I regarded it as a speculation I would——"

"Say no more!" interrupted the young girl. "My father may be angry, but he knows you too well to attribute such paltry motives to you; and if he is angry I will quiet him by showing him that you erred through generosity and are the victim of your good heart."

"Some one is coming," said Savinien, who, while talking, had been listening to the sounds wafted from outside. "I heard a door open."

"It is the sitting-room door."

"It is in the sitting-room that he received Madame Montauron, is it not?"

"Yes, he is showing her out, no doubt, and if the interview is over he

will certainly come here, for when he left me he told me not to stir till he returned."

"Well, then, let him come! I am ready to see him."

"But he does not expect to find you here; and if he does find you who knows how he will take it? If I warned him it would be better."

"Don't do so! Madame Montauron is with him, beyond a doubt, and he would not like you to show yourself while she is here. I hear them crossing the dining-room."

"Yes, the staircase door is being opened softly—Madame Montauron has gone and the door has closed again."

"You see that it is too late. I hear my uncle's step; he is coming; don't be frightened; let me speak!"

At this moment the baron entered, and seeing his nephew, exclaimed:

"Ah! you are here. What are you doing here? You know very well that some one is waiting for you."

"No," replied Savinien, without the least embarrassment. "Madame Montauron is not waiting for me, and it is better that she should return home alone."

"Madame Montauron! I think that it is very bold of you to mention her name before your cousin. Have you been taking upon yourself to tell her——"

"Savinien," interrupted Yvonne, "has been telling me that he had been slandered, and that Madame Montauron came here to clear him. That is all he told me."

"Well and good! But I have some questions to ask him, and I wish you to leave us."

"Very willingly, as I am sure that you will call me back before long," replied Yvonne, who had at once seen, from her father's face, that the storm had passed by. Her heart was once more full of hope.

The baron took her by the hand, led her into the dining-room, returned, and bolted the door, "You will admit," said he, to Savinien, "that for a month past you have done nothing but commit one act of folly after another."

"Acts of folly which no egotist would have committed, however," replied Viscount d'Amaulis, with warmth.

"That may be: but you have placed yourself and me in a very bad position."

"And you?"

"Yes, indeed! How can I look Montauron in the face again, after having deceived him in such an unworthy manner?"

"But he is not aware that such is the case."

"But do you imagine that my conscience does not reproach me for having brought about this marriage? I had no idea of the existence of that child, still I ought to have made full inquiries before advising a worthy man to marry as I did. In reality, it is now my duty to go to him and confess everything."

"But it would be condemning the daughter of your best friend to death. He would kill her."

"He would, undoubtedly, and thanks to you, I am caught in a trap from which I shall not escape without a deal of trouble. To save this woman, I am obliged to become her accomplice."

"You will save her, will you not?"

"I shall try, although the task is very repugnant to me. But if I take

part in it, I shall do so in my own way. From this day forward the matter no longer concerns you."

"That is all I ask."

"But you must tell me everything. In the first place, is it certain that Montauron did not see you go away with his wife, and follow you?"

"It is perfectly certain. There was no one in the street when I entered the hotel," said Savinien.

"The cab is no longer there," said Monsieur de Trémorin, looking out of the widow. "Let us hope that she will reach home safely. Now, what have you accomplished with this man, Aparanda? Madame Montauron told me that he would only allow you till to-morrow, and that she is ready to give up her diamonds, if he will restore her daughter and her letters. She told me no more as to what has been done in the matter, but you have seen him. What has been arranged between you?"

"That I should write to him as soon as possible to give him an appointment."

"With me?"

"Yes. I hoped that after seeing Madame Montauron you would consent to treat with this miserable wretch on her behalf."

"I consent to see him, and will treat him as I see fit. I have not yet made up my mind to hand the diamonds over to him. But, first of all, you must give me the casket. Let us go to your rooms."

"It is not there."

"How is that?"

"I left it with George Fougeray for him to keep it for me."

"What!" exclaimed M. de Trémorin, "have you left two hundred thousands francs' worth of diamonds in the hands of that stock-jobbing Bohemian? You have a strange way of placing your confidence, I must say."

"I assure you, uncle, that Fougeray is incapable of abusing my trust," exclaimed Savinien, energetically, "and I declare to you that the diamonds are much safer in his rooms than in mine, for he has an iron safe to keep them in while I have only some drawers. Besides, I could not carry the casket home with me without being seen by Monsieur Montauron, whom I suspected of having gone to wait near my door for my arrival. Indeed, when I reached home, I saw that the door-keeper was keeping a look-out."

"Montauron is watching you, then? I thought so. His wife tells me that she does not in the least understand the way in which he acts. He never speaks of her diamonds, and lives with her on the same terms as ever, but isolates her completely. All visitors are told that she is ill."

"But he took her to the races to-day."

"And made a show of leaving her alone in the carriage. I should not be surprised if he had been watching her all the while, and it is not clear yet whether you won't have some trouble with him. But this isn't the question. The diamonds must be given in exchange for the child, and I must have the casket. Madame Montauron has just handed me the key. I suppose that Monsieur Fougeray will make no difficulty about giving the offer to me upon a word from you."

"Certainly not."

"Well, as I don't care to receive that knight of the Bourse here, write to him this evening to say that I will call at his house to-morrow at eleven. I don't wish to detain him during Bourse hours. And let Count

Aparanda know that I will see him to-morrow at noon. He lives at the Grand Hôtel, does he not?"

"He did at one time, but I don't know whether he is still lodging there. It would be better to give him an appointment elsewhere."

"Good! This fine gentleman has no fixed abode. That is all that was wanting to complete the picture! Where shall you direct your letter?"

"To his club, the Plungers."

"Oh, yes, that gambling-house which you were admitted to. That is another fine thing you did. But no matter! Tell him that I will call for him to-morrow, at noon, at this sham club. I may just as well do so as I have begun to associate with such people."

"He will be there, for he promised to call this evening for my letter."

"Sit down, then. There are writing materials on the table. Write, but be concise: 'Baron de Trémorin will present himself to-morrow, between twelve and one.' Not a word more."

Savinien did as he was bidden, and also penned a few lines to George Fougeray. "I will take the note to Aparanda and return in a moment," he said rising up when he had finished.

"I did not tell you to return," replied the baron.

"Then you have not forgiven me yet?" said Savinien.

"I excuse you to a certain extent. I admit that as regards your connection with Madame Montauron, your conduct has been correct, though you have run great risks. But that does not wipe away all the rest."

"Do you forbid me to hope, then?"

"To hope for what? That I shall allow you to marry Yvonne? This is a nice time for reminding me that I once had views which I no longer have and cannot entertain," replied the baron, opening the door.

"You drive me away, then!" exclaimed Savinien, in a hoarse voice.

"No! no! We shall soon see one another again, but I restore you your liberty and the management of your little fortune, which you must now attend to yourself. I ought to have done this long ago. I hope that we shall be good friends all the same."

"I can call here then as I used to do."

"Didn't I say so? Let me tell you what will be the end of the matter I am managing. When I have finished with Aparanda, I shall go back to Plouër. I shall not close my door to my sister's son; but just now you must go and carry war into Sweden."

Yvonne half opened the sitting-room door, but her father signed to her to retreat, and led Viscount d'Amaulis on to the landing, Savinien went down the stairs, sad, but not without hope.

IX.

AFTER the defeat of Albion, George Fougeray went away from the races in despair. He had just staked his last card, and had lost. It was utter ruin that had befallen him, for he had not told Savinien all. He had been going from one disaster to another ever since the beginning of the month. Each day had deepened the gulf opened by a bad speculation on 'Change. And, as on 'Change everything is known, his credit was all falling to pieces. His Ottoman stock was held by Galipot, who now exacted security when operating for him. There was no more political news for him to take advantage of, Rheinthal being absent. It was said that his illustrious

patron had given him a financial mission in Germany, and that he would not be back for a long time. And, to crown all these misfortunes, the note held by Pinchard was now on the point of falling due.

Had it not been necessary to meet this fatal note on the 15th of June, Fougéray might still have held out. There are ways of managing matters with brokers, and Galipot had no interest in crushing an unfortunate companion in speculation, who had already helped him to earn a deal of money, and might again do so. Galipot might have consented to wait for an arrangement of his difficulties, and the proverb: "Whoever does not owe on pay-day is safe," is as applicable at the Bourse as anywhere else.

Savinien alone could help him out of his difficulties by applying to his uncle, but Savinien appeared little disposed to try this. The viscount would, no doubt, end by paying when he was forced to do so, but Fougéray would be past redemption before this was done.

Fougéray now asked himself whether he would not do as well to see the Baron de Trémorin himself, so as to tell him that it would be wisest to rescue Viscount d'Amaulais at once from the clutches of a hard-fisted money-lender, against security from himself—Fougéray—and from Savinien also. This was a bold step, but it offered a chance of success. The great difficulty consisted in approaching this uncle, who seemed so hard to get at, and George pondered as to the chances of this risky venture. While he was thus pondering, Savinien's letter was handed to him.

The way was now open, as the baron was to call on the morrow to take away the casket, and this casket might even serve as an opening for the conversation, for Fougéray suspected that he had an important deposit in his charge, and flattered himself that it would be thought he had taken excellent care of it.

While he was still twisting the note in his fingers it flashed across his mind that this was probably the casket which Savinien had made so much mystery about, and which he had wished him to withdraw from the Provincial Bank vaults. There was evidently something under all this, and Fougéray, by dint of recalling various circumstances to his mind, concluded that the Montaurons were concerned in the matter.

"I also am concerned in it," he thought, "and so is Baron de Trémorin, it appears. I have in hand a deposit of jewels, perhaps letters which compromise some one, and it may be that they compromise Madame Montauron. I should be a fool if I could not, somehow or other, induce the uncle to free his nephew from the debt he owes, and I must do so without abusing my position as a holder of this deposit, though I may take advantage of it to make terms with the baron."

Having thus concluded, George Fougéray felt somewhat reassured, and he was now anxious to interview M. de Trémorin, who might prove his deliverer. He longed for the morrow to come, and he thought that the best thing he could do to calm his impatience would be to take his dinner in the open air in the Champs Elysées, and spend the evening at Mabilles. He was not sorry, besides, to appear at that gay place so as to put a stop to any rumours which might be astir as to the state of his affairs. He well knew that in Paris the more a man finds himself cramped the less he ought to show it. However, he but little thought that fresh complications were about to arise from his decision to go out and try to enjoy himself.

At seven o'clock he seated himself before a table at the Café des Ambassadeurs, and drank two bottles of Moët's Brut Impérial, in

presence of two thousand diners of both sexes. This made him a little more lively, and he then proceeded to the Summer Circus, on leaving which, a couple of hours later, he made a joyous entry into Mabilie.

Everybody was shoving and shouting, every language was being spoken, and there was even some fighting going on, as was usual, at this ball on the evening of the race for the Grand Prize, when blows were frequently exchanged by men of different nationalities. However, George cared nothing at all about all this. He rushed boldly into the thick of the turmoil, made his way through the crowd, accosted ten fops and twenty "irregulars" of his acquaintance, upset some chairs, broke some lamps, overturned some tables by catching his foot in them, and finally succeeded in securing a position upon the raised platform of the café, so as to be seen and clearly establish the fact that he was having a "good time of it."

To the people who spoke to him he declared that he had won six hundred louis on Foxhall, and that he was going to celebrate his triumph by supping with a party of friends at the Café Anglais.

It is needless to state that he had not the faintest wish to take any supper, and that he required great will-power to play so naturally and easily the part he had undertaken to perform. Moreover, he was not sufficiently under the influence of wine to keep it up for any length of time. So he began to think of going home to bed. He had done what he wished. All the brokers strolling along the promenade had seen him, and could detect no trace of his being a ruined man. This was all he had aimed at, and he was just about to slip back into the crowd and make for the exit, when he saw Count Aparanda coming towards him, borne along by the current which rolled round the circle set aside for dancing.

The meeting was not an agreeable one to George. He had not the least motive for reassuring this individual—whom the members of the Plungers' Club held in little esteem—as to his financial situation. He still felt bitter against him on account of his losses at play. So he made haste to turn his back upon him, and he thought that the Swede would go his way without stopping.

But this was a mistake. Aparanda came up the steps of the café, and with a smiling face approached Viscount d'Amaulius' friend.

"I am glad that I came to Mabilie," said he, "as it gives me the pleasure of meeting you here."

"I'm very sorry," said Fougerey in an easy tone, "but I've had enough of all this, and I am going home."

"Don't go till I have spoken to you for a moment. I wish to see you about a matter which concerns you, and I was thinking of calling and seeing you to-morrow morning. But we can talk it all over here."

"I did not come here to attend to business matters," rejoined George; "besides, I don't know what you can possibly have to say to me, or what we can have to talk over, in the way of business. Our affairs, as to what you won of me at cards, were settled long ago, and we have no others to liquidate."

"It isn't that which I wished to speak of. I want to propose to you an operation which would be of great advantage to you."

"And to you, I suppose!" said George, ironically.

"Of course," replied Aparanda, without being in the least disconcerted, "but I declare to you that you are more interested in the matter than I am."

"I doubt that."

"I will prove it to you, if you will be kind enough to sit down with me at that table which is now free, over there at the end of the hall. We cannot talk among all these people without being overheard."

George's curiosity was excited by Aparanda's persistence, and he wanted to know what the Swede could have to say to him.

"So be it," said he, "but pray be brief. Some one is waiting for me."

It was necessary to make haste, for there was a rush for the seats, but fortunately they reached the vacant chairs before those behind them came up. When they were seated in front of one another, and as soon as the waiter had poured out two glasses of what professed to be old brandy, Count Aparanda began as follows: "Don't fly into a passion, I beg you, as I have no intention of offending you. I wish, on the contrary, to be useful to you. So let me remind you that just now you are very short of money."

"That isn't true," exclaimed Fougeray, "and if it were, it wouldn't concern you."

"I grant that. But I have come to offer to adjust your difficulties."

"I repeat that they only exist in your imagination, and that I do not need your good offices."

"I expected that reply. It is only quite natural that you should try to hide your true situation, and that you should mistrust me. But I will be clear. You have a note in Pinchard's hands—a note for forty-three thousand francs, payable June 15th, that is to say, in three days from now."

"How do you know that?" stammered Fougeray, who was now completely disconcerted.

"I know this Pinchard from having formerly borrowed money from him," said Aparanda, "and I am still in some degree engaged in money matters with which he is acquainted. It is always a good thing when one plays a heavy game to have a money-lender at one's disposal. I formerly owed money to him, but now it is he who owes me a somewhat large amount—money which I placed in his hands on coming to Paris, as I did not care to let it lie idle. I am going away, however, and am about to withdraw this money. I have so informed Pinchard, who asked me if it would suit me to take as part-payment of what he owes me a note signed by you, and endorsed by Monsieur d'Amaulis."

"Did you accept?"

"I accepted conditionally. I wished to see you to find out whether you would be ready on Wednesday next. You can well understand that as I am about to leave France I have no time to wait."

Fougeray reflected a moment, and thought that it was better to have even Pinchard as a creditor than to fall into the clutches of a foreigner of suspicious character.

"The note will be paid one of these days," he said, with a careless air, "but not at date. Pinchard promised me that he would renew it. He has broken his word, and I intend to teach him not to make game of me. It will cost me something, no doubt, but I shall have the pleasure of annoying him."

"That is a more expensive pleasure than you may think. The protest will ruin your credit."

"That solely concerns me."

"Very well! but if you could avoid an annoying affair, I think that you would prefer a satisfactory arrangement to no end of trouble."

"Arrangement! Did Pinchard tell you to propose one to me?"

"Perhaps so."

"Explain yourself, then. I will see whether I can accept your offer."

"What I wish to propose is very simple. I will hand you back the note——"

"When I give you forty-three notes of a thousand francs each! This is a joke. I have told you that I don't intend to pay on Wednesday."

"I speak seriously. It depends upon you to free yourself from this debt without paying anything whatever."

"Do you intend, then, to make me a present of two thousand five hundred louis?" said George, with a sarcastic grimace.

"A present! No, not exactly. It will be an exchange."

"An exchange of what? Of acts of politeness?"

"Yes, in a manner. I will free you from your trouble if you will do me a service."

"You make your meaning clear. You have some piece of rascality to propose to me."

This was said with such coolness that the Swede took the reply for a consent beforehand, and did not mince the matter any longer.

"Nothing of the sort," said he, without taking offence at the words which Fougerey had made use of to describe the transaction. "You have only to give me a casket that is in your rooms, and which is of no value to any one but me."

George Fougerey started, and, had he yielded to his first impulse, he would have summarily put a stop to all propositions from Count Aparanda, by treating him as he deserved, and by rising and breaking off the conversation. But Parisian life had spoiled him. It had not deprived him of all moral sense, and he did not for an instant think of selling a friend's secret to the rascal now before him. But the idea came to him of finding out the Swede's own secrets. It was a means of gaining power over him, and he foresaw that by managing matters adroitly he might derive some advantage from the complicated state of things, without having an infamous act on his conscience.

"A casket in my rooms?" said he, feigning astonishment.

"Don't try to deny it. The person who left it in your care told me so."

"Ah, indeed! Did he tell you, besides, what was in the casket?"

"That was unnecessary. I knew it already. What the casket contains belongs to me."

"Then I can understand that you want to have it."

"I very much wish to have it. The proof of that is——"

"The proof of that," interrupted George, "is that you wish to buy it from me at a very high price. But why don't you go to the person who gave it to me to take care of?"

"Because he would refuse to surrender it to me."

"Well, you are certainly frank, I must say! You think that I shall be less scrupulous than he is. I am greatly obliged to you for the opinion which you entertain of me, but I must inform you that you are mistaken. I shan't hand you in exchange for a small sum of money a casket which is undoubtedly worth a great deal more. Supposing that I were unscrupulous enough to accept your proposal, I should be taken in by it."

Aparanda evidently expected a more satisfactory reply, but he did not give up the attempt. "I see," said he, after a moment's silence, "that

I have not sufficiently explained the matter to you, and I will now tell you everything."

"That is the best thing you can do," replied George Fougeray, quietly. "You must understand that I shall make no arrangement with you till I know what I shall be giving you in exchange for my note."

"That is very true," answered Aparanda, eagerly. "You have not opened the casket since it has been in your possession?"

"No, sir. I had an excellent reason for that. I had not got the key."

The Swede's face lighted up. This reply entirely coincided with what Viscount d'Amaulis had told him, and he rightly concluded that Fougeray could not have tampered with the diamonds.

"Well!" he replied, "if you had opened it you would have found inside some letters written by me to a woman, and even a promise of marriage which I was at one time so foolish as to sign. This was a serious error, for—it costs me something to confess this, but I promised to hide nothing from you—at the time when I thus bound myself I was married to a person in my own country. This promise is not worth anything, it must be said, as the woman to whom it was given has married since that time; but you must see how much I wish to destroy this proof of a weakness which I blush for."

"And you would pay forty-three thousand francs for the pleasure of destroying it? That is a high price."

Aparanda felt the thrust and hastily added: "I must, I see, tell you something more. Let me, then, inform you that I had at one time the folly to borrow some money from this woman with whom I was upon a footing which I need not explain, and these letters of mine, which she kept, prove that I still owe her this money. This is because an opportunity to return it to her has been wanting. It is a matter of five hundred louis. I am anxious to bring the affair to an end and to recover my letters. The lady is watched by a very jealous husband, and I cannot treat directly with her. Why shouldn't you be my intermediary? I will give you the five hundred louis——"

"And my note as a remuneration for my care and trouble," interrupted Fougeray. "You are very generous, sir."

"Then, it is agreed and settled."

"No, not even begun, for I don't know to whom I am to hand the five hundred louis, and I am desirous above all things of knowing that."

"To Viscount d'Amaulis, if you please. He will undertake to hand them to the lady."

"Very well! But I must consult him first."

Aparanda bit his lip. He saw that he was blundering, and immediately changed his tactics. "That is just what I don't wish," said he, eagerly. "Monsieur d'Amaulis is very peculiarly situated as regards this lady and as regards me."

"Do you mean to say that he is her lover?"

"Don't oblige me to speak more plainly, I beg of you. Let it suffice for me to say that this afternoon I had a long conversation with Monsieur d'Amaulis at the races, and that we could not agree. It was he who told me that you had charge of the casket, and it was then that it came into my head to apply to you, for you are not under the same influence and you are a practical man."

"What is this lady's name?" abruptly asked George Fougeray.

"Swear to me that it shall remain a secret between us," said Aparanda, feigning hesitation.

"Who the mischief should I tell it to?"

"This lady, then, is one whom you must know. It is Madame Montauron."

"The wife of the director of the Provincial Bank? I only know her by sight."

"You are free, then, to act as you please."

"No; for I know her husband, and I am the friend of Monsieur d'Amaulis, who would never forgive me for meddling with his private affairs."

"He will, on the contrary, be grateful to you for helping him out of a serious difficulty."

"You choose to say that, but I shall wait till he tells me so."

"You refuse, then?"

"Yes, utterly! And I advise you not to insist, as my resolution is firm and won't change. Keep your money; I shall keep the casket till Monsieur d'Amaulis comes for it."

George Fougeray had certainly some merit in replying in this manner, in the desperate position in which he found himself, but, after all, he was only doing his duty. He had understood from the outset what advantage was to be derived from Count Aparanda's confidential communications. He knew that Baron de Trémorin would call on him on the morrow to ask for the casket; he had no doubt but what it contained Madame Montauron's diamonds, and he realised the true aim of Aparanda. The Scandinavian scamp hoped to be able to obtain possession, in exchange for fifty-three thousand francs, of a number of jewels which were undoubtedly worth three or four times as much. George preferred to retain the esteem, and, above all, the gratitude of M. de Trémorin, to recovering his note and receiving ten thousand francs over and above the bargain.

This calculation would prove correct, if Savinien's uncle only believed in George Fougeray's sincerity when he told him the story of the attempt at bribery, and how he had repulsed it. But then the baron did not appear to be a credulous sort of man.

"Sir," said Aparanda, who would not yet give up the point, "your disinterestedness is admirable, but it will have fatal consequences. Madame Montauron has my letters; I have hers; and if I threaten to make use of them, I can soon force her to capitulate."

"That would be abominable black-mail," said George Fougeray, coldly. He no longer cared to qualify his expressions. "You are free to do as you please. But I think that it is as well to tell you that her husband isn't easy to deal with, and that if he thought you were bent upon anything of the kind, you might regret having attacked his honour as a married man. But now I think of it, you have perhaps an idea of selling Madame Montauron's letters to him."

"You are mistaken, sir," replied Aparanda, without flinching. "I shall not sell these letters to any one. I shall simply keep them if Madame Montauron refuses to return me mine. This is what Madame Montauron wishes to prevent at any cost, and the proof of it is that this afternoon she instructed Viscount d'Amaulis to propose an exchange to me; however, there is a condition attached to the offer which I cannot accept. It does not suit me, I repeat, to treat with the viscount, but I am fully disposed to treat with you. It will cost me much dearer, since

I shall hand your note back to you, but at least I shall avoid the annoyance of finding myself with a man whom I greatly dislike. In one word, to show you exactly what I feel, I don't care to treat with my successor in Madame Montauron's affections."

"You display most unlooked-for delicacy of feeling," replied George, in an ironical tone. "Have you so expressed yourself to Monsieur d'Amaulis?"

"There was no need of it. He would not have understood how I felt," retorted the Swede. "He wishes to take an active part in the matter, and he thinks himself called upon to do so because he is young and in love. I might, perhaps, have felt the same at his age. But now-a-days I am practical, and so are you. It is for that reason I have applied to you, and I still hope that we shall end by coming to an understanding."

George Fougerey, without departing from his bantering and indifferent manner, listened very attentively to all this, and began to understand his adversary's purpose. Savinien had never spoken to him about Madame Montauron's letters, but it was probable that they really existed, that they were in Aparanda's hands, and that Madame Montauron particularly desired to buy them back.

Fougerey, who was very intelligent, already guessed that the diamonds were the ransom, and that M. de Trémorin, who would call on the morrow to take the casket away, was the intermediary appointed by the lady to take Savinien d'Amaulis' place. Thus Count Aparanda's perfidious plot now appeared very clear to him. The Swede feared M. de Trémorin's intervention and had made up his mind to make a sacrifice to obtain possession of the diamonds, and intended to disappear as soon as he had them, merely leaving a part of Madame Montauron's letters behind him, and keeping the rest to use against her at a later period.

M. de Trémorin, who probably knew how many letters had been written in all, would be less easy to deceive. He would, undoubtedly, drive a hard bargain, and even threaten to hand the accomplished black-mailer over to the police. Now, it was well worth the Scandinavian's while to get rid of all these possible difficulties by a large payment of money.

"This scoundrel thinks that I am no better than he is," said George Fougerey to himself. "But I will show him that he is not able to get the better of me, and I shan't be driven to commit an infamous act to get my note out of his or Pinchard's clutches. The baron wouldn't, perhaps, have believed me on my word if I had boasted to him of having refused the presents of this low-bred Artaxerxes, but he will come to my rooms to-morrow morning, and he must believe his eyes and ears. When he has seen and heard everything, he can no longer doubt my disinterestedness. I mustn't now discourage the Swede; I must get him to bring me Madame Montauron's letters to-morrow."

"Well, sir," said Count Aparanda, "have you reflected? Shall we end this matter to the satisfaction of all parties, or will you force me to make use of other means to obtain restoration of what belongs to me? I should regret being driven to such measures, but——"

"My answer is this," interrupted George, "I am but little inclined to give up to you a casket which has been confided to me, but what you have just told me changes the situation; and if you really possess letters written to you by Madame Montauron, I may consent to an exchange."

"That is what I ask."

"You must show me these letters. Where are they?"

"In the vaults of the Provincial Bank. On the day when I deposited them I met Monsieur d'Amaulis, whom I did not know, there. He on his side, had come to deposit Madame Montauron's letters."

Fougeray immediately remembered that Savinien had spoken of this meeting, and he concluded that what Aparanda now said was true. "Then," said he, "you must take them out and bring them to me. Without them I won't give up the casket. You give and I give."

"That is just. But there is a difficulty. I have reason to believe that Monsieur Montauron is watching me. He does not know everything, but he is not ignorant of the fact that I formerly courted his wife. That is why I don't wish to go to the Provincial Bank in person. But you could go in my place."

George Fougeray had not forgotten that Savinien also had proposed to him to go and remove a casket from the vaults, and he was not a little surprised to hear Aparanda propose something similar.

"How could I take out a deposit made in your name?" he asked.

The Swede now entered into explanations similar to those which Savinien had given, and in reply George Fougeray raised absolutely the same objections as he had made to his friend. He ended by insisting that the letters should be taken out of the vaults by the Swede, and brought to his rooms. "When I have seen the letters we may be able to come to an agreement," he added. "Until then I say nothing."

Aparanda did not evince any haste in replying. He was reflecting, and it was clear that these conditions greatly annoyed him. His plans were, undoubtedly, upset; however, to get possession of the diamonds he was prepared for a sacrifice.

"Remember," said he, "that I have no time to lose. I wish to end this matter to-morrow morning, and the Provincial Bank does not open till nine."

"The Avenue de l'Opéra is quite close to the Rue d'Antin where I live, and I will wait for you till noon. You can, therefore, if you like, take the box, in which you keep Madame Montauron's letters, home, remove the packet, and bring it to me between eleven o'clock and noon," said Fougeray, who remembered that the hour for the appointment with the baron was eleven. "I have only that hour free in the morning."

"I shall be punctual, and hope that we shall promptly finish the matter."

"You will find that I shall have the casket all ready on my table."

"Very good! Then with the letters I will give you the ten thousand francs which I owe to Madame Montauron. As for Pinchard's note, I don't insist on the point, as, through an excess of delicacy, you do not want me to return it to you, but, if you change your mind, you have only to speak, as it will be in my pocket-book."

"Bring it, at all events," said George, with an air of indifference. Meantime, he watched Aparanda's face and saw that it changed. The scoundrel did not believe in the openness of others. He judged them by himself, and he had had doubts as to Fougeray's intentions when the latter refused to receive the price of the treacherous act which he wished him to commit, and had thought that George's disinterestedness hid some trap. Now, however, he considered that he was dealing with a man as unscrupulous as he was himself, and no longer feared anything, but felt sure of coming into possession of the diamonds. He even regretted

having offered so large a bribe, and thought that he might have been able to obtain them at a lower figure.

Fougeray's final reply had been a master-stroke, and to leave it unimpaired, he now rose. "We agree, then," said he; "I must leave you, with your permission."

"Until to-morrow morning," replied Aparanda. "That interview will be our last, as all my preparations for departure are made, and I shall leave Paris to-morrow evening."

"I won't detain you, I beg of you to believe it," replied Fougeray, who was anxious to leave the place, and soon disappeared in the crowd. He was longing to return home, but he did not regret his visit to Mabilles, for he was delighted with what he had accomplished.

"Madame Montauron will owe me a great many thanks," thought he, as he hastened towards the exit. "She will have her letters, and will, perhaps, retain her diamonds. The Swede will give in if Monsieur de Trémorin shows his teeth, and I shall have an indisputable claim upon the gratitude of the nobleman from Brittany. After hearing what he will hear in my rooms, he can't have the heart to refuse to pay Pinchard's note."

George Fougeray was not wrong in congratulating himself, for there was a certain justice in his calculations. They were wrong in but one point, which was unknown to him. He could not guess that there was a child in the case, and that the lady whom Baron de Trémorin was defending cared more about recovering her daughter than about regaining possession of her letters.

X.

ON the morrow after his visit to the Mabilles, George rose early, took a cup of chocolate, and dressed himself in the same style as though he had been going to fight a duel. At as early as ten he was equipped, ready for anything, and quite disposed to receive the two visits he expected. He had slept but little, having spent the better part of the night in thinking over the plan by which he wished to trick the Swede. It was simple and easy to execute.

M. de Trémorin would come first; George relied upon telling him in a few words how matters stood, communicating Count Aparanda's propositions, and begging him to go into the parlour where he might hear everything that would be said, and make his appearance at the proper moment. This would induce him, on George refusing the Swede's bribe, to pay Pinchard's note. The crafty speculator felt some doubt, however, as to the baron's consenting to listen to what he was intended to hear. But whether he consented or not, he would not refuse to remain till Aparanda appeared, and this would give Savinien's friend the opportunity of reproaching the rascal in M. de Trémorin's presence for attempting to bribe him, of silencing him if he said any more on the matter, and helping the baron to bring him to terms.

George placed the casket upon the table and turned it about in his hands as he did so. "There are diamonds in this casket of a certainty," muttered he, "and they must be worth a great deal of money. The last time I saw Madame Montauron in her box at the opera, she shone like the sun itself. I remember a necklace and earrings which had stones like hazel-

nuts. She fairly dazzled my eyes. I am not surprised that the rascally Scandinavian should offer me a note of forty-three thousand francs, and even ten thousand more in cash, for his pretended debt to Madame Montauron is a mere trick."

Just at this moment a loud ring was heard at the bell, and made Fougeray start. "There comes the baron," he muttered. "The deuce! He is too early. Savinien wrote to me that he would be here at eleven, and my clock says half past ten. He is just like quicksilver, and I shall never be able to keep him in a humour to wait till noon, especially as he only comes to fetch the casket, and will be too impatient to listen to what I have to say."

On opening the door, however, George was not a little surprised to find himself confronted by Count Aparanda.

"I am punctual, you see," said the latter, in a most engaging manner.

"I beg your pardon," said Fougeray, "true punctuality consists in being neither too early nor too late. You were to come at half past eleven, and not at half past ten."

"That is true; but what does it matter? Your rooms are not a railway station, which one has to reach at a particular moment under penalty of missing the train, and shifting from one foot to the other in a waiting-room."

The important matter now was to make the count remain until the baron came, and not to get the baron to wait till the count appeared. What was to be done? Should he send Aparanda away? The Swede was quite cunning enough to detect some attempt to entrap him if such a course were followed, and would most likely go off and never return for fear of being tricked. If he did return he might meet Savinien's uncle upon the stairs. George was utterly at a loss.

"What ails you, sir?" asked the Swede, who saw his hesitation, and looked frowningly at him. "You seem to hesitate about allowing me to enter. Have you changed your mind? It would be a pity, for I have Pinchard's note in my pocket, and a roll of ten notes of a thousand francs each, and we can end the matter in a minute; while, if you put me off till two Sundays meet, I shall be obliged to let the matter go, as I leave Paris to-day and have but little time remaining to me."

"I have but little time myself," replied George Fougeray. "I am waiting for my broker's clerk. I thought it was he when you rang. I am afraid that we shall be disturbed while we are talking, and for that reason I should have preferred to defer our interview for half-an-hour. However, as you are here, come in. When the clerk comes you must excuse me for five minutes."

"Certainly! Besides, we may have ended our chat before he appears."

"Not so soon as you think, my good fellow," said George to himself. "I'll undertake to make a diversion."

He conducted the Swede into the smoking-room, and, to smooth his ruffled temper, pointed out the precious casket, which was boldly displayed upon the table.

"That is right!" exclaimed Aparanda. "I see that we shall come to terms, and to show you that I am fully disposed to do so, I will begin by telling you that I am satisfied with your word of honour."

"About what?"

"As to the contents of this casket. You cannot open it as you have not got the key, and I will not offend you by breaking the lock in your

presence. I would rather rely upon what you say. Swear to me that this little steel casket is the one which your friend Viscount d'Amaulis confided to you."

"I swear it on my honour, but that is all that I can say about it. It was given to me closed, as now; I show it to you as I received it, and I don't know whether there are letters or valuables inside."

"Letters, nothing but letters," said the Swede eagerly.

"You assert it, and I cannot dispute your word, but I am not obliged to believe it."

"What do you mean, sir? Do you doubt it? It seems to me that I am the person who ought to doubt, as I never saw Madame Montauron's casket in which my correspondence was kept, and there is nothing to show me that some other coffer may not have been placed here instead of it."

"There is nothing to prove to me that this one is not full of bank-notes or cheques payable to bearer. If that were the case, you would be doing a fine stroke of business by getting it for forty-three or fifty-three thousand francs. It isn't very large, but a million might be inside."

Aparanda started. He had not expected this objection. He immediately began to think that Fougeray knew more than he wished to tell, and was trying to obtain a higher price for his treason. At the same time he felt that he must put a bold face upon the matter and brave it out. "You have a strange opinion of me, sir," said he, in an offended tone. "By speaking like that, you force me to say that your good faith is not above suspicion any more than mine, and that I am disbursing a very large sum to buy, as the saying goes, 'a cat in a bag.' However, if you choose to place the conversation upon this footing, it is useless to prolong it. Keep the casket; I will retain my liberty, and the power to act as I please with Madame Montauron's letters. Good-day, sir, since this is all you have to say."

"You misunderstand me," replied George Fougeray, who, while he had not the slightest intention of favouring Aparanda's purpose, still wished to detain him till M. de Trémorin arrived. "If I make this objection, it is because I wish to prove to you that I am able to look at both sides of the question. You have, it is evident, a great interest in taking away this casket. That is sufficient to give me the right to lay down my conditions before giving it up to you. But I have no cause to trouble myself as to whether it contains a fortune or only some love-letters."

"That is better," replied Aparanda, smiling with pleasure. "I thought, for a moment, that we were about to quarrel. Our conditions were all made last night. We have only to fulfil them."

"The first of all is to restore Madame Montauron's letters to me."

"I have brought them; but here, before everything, is your note, with the ten thousand francs which I owe to the lady."

As he spoke, the Swede drew the note and the money from his pocket, and laid both upon the table.

"Be good enough to look at the promissory note," said he. "It is receipted, you see, and I beg you to count over the bank notes also."

George had only to stretch out his hand to take up both the note and the money. But he did not for a moment contemplate doing so.

"Let us begin at the beginning," said he firmly. "Give me the letters."

"They are here," replied the count, holding out a small packet tied with a blue ribbon.

The packet looked like a collection of love-letters. The paper was fine, with a penetrating perfume, and the handwriting was evidently that of a woman. George took it and began to examine it, in order to find a fresh pretext for delay.

"Open one—any one—and look at the name signed to it," said Aparanda.

"The signature is the Christian name—Aurélié," muttered Fougéray, as he did so.

"Well, you are doubtless aware that before her marriage Madame Montauron was called Mademoiselle Aurélié de Louvigné."

"I beg your pardon. I never knew her first name."

"Ask your friend, Monsieur d'Amaulis; he will tell you as I do. Now that I have kept all my promises, there is nothing, I presume, to stand in the way of my taking away this casket?"

The hands of the clock now pointed to five minutes to eleven. Five minutes more must be gained. It was probable that M. de Trémorin, having formerly served in the navy, would be very exact as to time, like most officers are. George was trying to invent a fresh pretext for delay as he turned over the letters.

"However," said he, "I do not know Madame Montauron's handwriting. What is there to prove that these letters were written by her?"

"Read them, and when you have read them you will entertain no further doubt. She talks of nothing but her husband, and occasionally of Monsieur de Trémorin."

"Read a lady's letters to her lover! What do you take me for, sir?"

"Come, sir, I am really beginning to think that you are making game of me with all these difficulties? You know very well I have not fabricated this correspondence, and you cannot, I presume, mean to keep me here till Madame Montauron has read, numbered, and commented upon her letters?"

"No, but I should like to be sure that all the letters are here."

"In other words, you suspect me of having kept some of them back in order to make a bad use of them. Truly, these scruples come rather late in the day, and if you will take the trouble to reason a little, you will see that they lack common sense. You must realise that I have but one wish, which is to take away this casket. When once I have it I shall not bother myself about annoying a woman whom I shall never see again in my life, as I am going to leave France, never to return."

George did not take the trouble to reply to this argument. His eyes followed the hands of the clock, and he thought they moved very slowly.

"I begin to think that you don't intend to conclude the matter," said the Swede, angrily; "and as I have no time to lose in talking, be kind enough to hand me back my packet of letters."

At this moment the clock struck eleven, and a ring at the bell announced a visitor.

"At last!" exclaimed George, looking up.

"What is that?" eagerly demanded Aparanda.

"The clerk whom I was waiting for. I must see him; there is no help for it, but he will only stay here a moment. Don't go, I beg of you. I will return immediately, and this time we will conclude matters, I promise you."

"So be it! but don't be long. I give you three minutes."

Fougéray hastily left the room. He left the casket near Aparanda,

but it was too large to be easily carried off, and as an extra precaution George had been careful to lock all the doors, so that there was no exit left by which the ante-room could be reached.

It was Baron de Trémorin who had rung. He had arrived at the exact hour and moment, and was buttoned up to the chin in a black overcoat. His hat was pulled down over his eyes, and his look was surly. The smiling welcome of George Fougeray did not make him any more pleasant, and he began with these somewhat abrupt words: "My nephew told you that I was coming. I have called for the casket which he left in your hands, and I beg of you to give it to me at once, as I am in a hurry."

"Come in, baron," said George, bowing respectfully. M. de Trémorin did so, but stopped as soon as he had crossed the threshold, and did not seem disposed to advance another step. This did not suit Fougeray, who had now decided on fresh tactics.

"The casket is ready, baron," said he, unlocking a door, "but as there is some one here whom I am about to send away, I must ask you to wait for a few moments in my reception-room."

"Very well, but be quick," replied Savinien's uncle. And with this he suffered himself to be shown into the chamber adjoining the smoking-room. George pointed to an arm-chair, and passed on to the apartment in which he had left Aparanda, and all this without adding a word. He had his reasons for not speaking further, and for leaving the door between the two rooms ajar.

"Here I am," said he to the Swede. "You see that I have made haste."

"You have been quick and cautious," muttered Aparanda. "You took care to lock me in. But I have no time to tell you what I think of your proceedings. Let us end this, pray! Take your note and your money. Keep the letters, and give me the casket. Open the door and let me go, and let us see each other no more."

"I hope, indeed, that we shall see no more of each other," replied George, raising his voice so as to be heard by M. de Trémorin. "But we have not come to the point that you think we have reached. I don't want your money, and you may take away the note that I had the folly to give to a money-lender, and which my friend Monsieur d'Amaulis kindly endorsed in order to assist me."

"What! you won't have it? Are you going to begin acting again? I do not believe in your disinterestedness, and I tell you so!"

"You are free to believe as you please. You thought me vile enough to sell to you a casket that did not belong to me. You were mistaken, and you are so now. Let me tell you that I would not let you have it for a million."

"You were making game of me, then?"

"Perhaps so."

"And you think the matter will stop there?"

"Oh, I am not afraid of you. I know that you are not a fighting man. Even if you were, you have every reason for avoiding a duel; as you are situated, you must be very anxious to get out of France. It isn't a good thing for you to be here."

Aparanda started. George, without knowing it, had found a weak place in his enemy's armour, and he saw him turn pale.

"Yes," said he, raising his voice still more, "I should advise you to

cross the frontiers as soon as you can. Black-mail is punishable by our laws, and so is cheating at cards. You have nothing to gain and everything to lose by staying in Paris."

"Very well, sir," replied the Swede, putting the note and money back into his pockets. "You will repent having misled me. Madame Montauron will curse you, for I shall not spare her. Give me back her letters!"

"Never, while I live!"

"Ah! this is too much! We shall see!"

"I have them and shall keep them."

"Ah! I begin to understand why you made me come here. It is an ambush!"

"I did not make you come here at all. You asked me to allow you to come, in the hope of concluding the infamous bargain which you proposed to me. I accepted, because I wished to deprive you of the power of doing any harm, by taking from you these letters which you would have made a bad use of. Everything has worked as I wished. I have nothing more to say to you, and you can go."

"Take care!" exclaimed Aparanda, who was livid with rage; "you forget that we are alone, and if you provoke me too far——"

"You will murder me? That is what you mean, is it? Try it!"

"For the last time will you give me the letters or the casket?"

"No; a thousand times no!"

"Then, wretch! you shall die!" cried the Swede, drawing a short, but extremely sharp stiletto from the pocket in which he had placed the money a moment before. Fougeray made a bound which brought him to the door of the reception-room. At the same moment M. de Trémorin appeared with a large revolver in his hand, which was levelled at Aparanda.

"Lay that knife upon that table," said he, coldly; "lay it there at once, or I will kill you like a dog!"

Aparanda uttered a cry of rage and took a step forward, but he saw at once that the contest, if he were mad enough to engage in one, would be unequal, for his stiletto was of little avail against the revolver with which the baron, who knew him of old, had been wise enough to provide himself. A knife is no match for a six-chambered revolver.

"I thought so. It is an ambush!" said the Scandinavian, throwing his dagger upon the table. Then, crossing his arms upon his chest, and looking at M. de Trémorin, he resumed: "Now, sir, what do you want with me?"

"You know perfectly well what I want," replied the baron, without any signs of emotion. "You know me, I presume?"

"Yes, and from you I can expect anything."

"It is for that reason you have attempted to steal this casket before the hour at which you were to meet me at the club."

"Steal it? No. I wished to buy it. This gentleman was quite ready to sell it to me, and only changed his mind when you arrived."

"That is false!" exclaimed George Fougeray. "I expected Monsieur de Trémorin, and if I pretended to listen to you, it was only so that I might keep you here till he came."

"Let me speak, sir," said Savinien's uncle. "You can reply when I question you." Then, addressing Aparanda, he added; "You are aware what this casket contains?"

"Letters and papers which I wish to have restored to me," replied the Swede, with the utmost audacity.

"You lie! and I will prove it."

With this the baron drew a small key from his pocket and opened the casket. There was a dazzling display of superb diamonds.

"There are more than two hundred thousand francs' worth of jewels here," resumed M. de Trémorin. "How much did this man offer you?" said he to George.

"He offered me a note which I had signed," stammered George.

"And which my nephew endorsed. I heard that, and I heard you refuse. You did right. The bargain would have been all in this man's favour, and he cannot now deny his fraudulent intentions. It was a swindle, and a daring one."

"Madame Montauron's letters are worth all that," said the Swede, shrugging his shoulders.

"Perhaps so. Monsieur Fougeray will give them to me, and I will answer the remark presently."

George, delighted by the turn which matters had taken, at once held out the packet to M. de Trémorin, who took it, closed the casket, and began to count the letters one by one.

"There are three missing," said he.

"I was sure of it!" exclaimed George.

"No matter. I will settle the matter with this man. Be good enough to leave us now. Take away that knife, and return into your bed-room. If I am not mistaken, it is separated from the apartment where we now are by another room."

"Where you were a minute ago. Yes, baron."

"Very well. I will call you when I have done with this man. But be good enough to open the door which you have locked. I am here to watch over the diamonds."

George had put the key in his pocket after locking the door upon Aparanda, but he now did as the baron requested, and discreetly withdrew.

"Let us finish this business," said M. de Trémorin to Aparanda.

"What do you want of me?" asked the Swede, recovering his composure. "Your accomplice has managed to possess himself of Madame Montauron's letters, and if I asked you to return them to me you would reply with your revolver. So I yield to force and relinquish them."

"What did you intend to do with them, eh? You wished to use them, no doubt, as weapons against a woman whom you treacherously deceived. Moreover, you have kept back three of the missives, so that the pretended sale was but a piece of trickery after all."

"I acted wisely, for I am not at your mercy now."

"Suppose I were willing to buy the three remaining letters?"

"Ah!" replied Aparanda with sparkling eyes.

"What amount do you want for them?"

"I want the same price as I asked for the whole packet. A single one of these notes would suffice to ruin Madame Montauron, if I chose to send it to her husband. Besides, I have kept back the ones which would be most likely to injure her."

"I dare say," said the baron, contemptuously. "You believe, then, that they are worth as much as the diamonds in this casket?"

"Yes, fully as much."

"That is to say two hundred thousand francs?"

"Well, that is a small amount compared with Monsieur Montauron's large fortune."

"Never mind, I didn't come here to bargain."

"Nor I, and the matter can be settled as soon as you please."

"I'll settle it as soon as you restore the child."

"The child!" ejaculated Aparanda, who was evidently very much disturbed.

"Yes," resumed the baron, "the child you abducted, but whom you offered to restore to her mother——"

"On certain conditions."

"I know what they are. You engaged to restore the child and the letters for two hundred thousand francs. I have the letters, less three. These three must now be forthcoming, and the child as well."

"And then you will give me the diamonds?"

"No; they don't belong to me, but I will hand you a cheque for two hundred thousand francs on the Provincial Bank."

Aparanda shrugged his shoulders.

"If you doubt its being paid you can make inquiries of Monsieur Bouret, for instance. He will tell you that a larger sum than that stands in my favour on his books."

"Excuse me, but that is Montauron's bank, and I fear——"

"What! aren't you a depositor there yourself? You hired one of the compartments in the vault, and placed a large chest in it. My nephew saw you do so; so you are well acquainted with the establishment. However, if you prefer to receive cash it is all the same to me. I merely spoke of a cheque because I have my cheque-book with me, and we might have settled the matter this very day."

"So you will give me this money when I hand you the three missing letters, and tell you where Madame Montauron's daughter is to be found?"

"That isn't quite the thing. You must conduct me to the child. That can be easily managed, if she is in the suburbs of Paris, as you told Monsieur d'Amaulis, and it won't take you long to go there. You must show her to me, and give orders in my presence, so that I may take her away with me. I shall take charge of her, at her mother's request, and bring her up. We will afterwards go to your lodgings together to fetch the letters, and then I will hand you the money."

"But what is there to prove," exclaimed the Swede, "that you will keep your word when once the child is in your power?"

"I should make any other man pay for such an insolent question. But with you I will merely say that you will still hold the three letters which you are not called upon to relinquish until I give you the money."

A spell of silence followed. Aparanda was reflecting; trying to devise some means of obtaining the money without carrying out the baron's conditions. As M. de Trémorin had never seen Madame Montauron's daughter, some child, skilfully taught to play a part, might perhaps be palmed off on him. Aparanda was acquainted with women who, for money, would join him in carrying out some such scheme. He had reached this point in his reflections when the baron remarked, "I forgot to add that Brigitte will accompany us when we go for the girl. She knows her well, and I must have her there to prevent any mistake."

Aparanda turned ghastly pale. His features contracted, and the blood fled even from his lips. He divined that the game was as good as lost.

"I won't see that woman!" he angrily retorted. "She insulted me, and I forbade her showing herself in my presence."

"That is a paltry excuse. You had better acknowledge that you refuse to accept the arrangement I propose."

"It doesn't suit me, and I won't prolong this talk. Keep your money and the letters which Monsieur Fougeray so skilfully appropriated, and I will resume my liberty of action."

"That means that you are going to betray Madame Montauron to her husband, and take her daughter abroad?"

"I am not compelled to answer you."

"Have a care, please. You perhaps fancy that the fear of compromising Madame Montauron will deter me from applying for the help of the legal authorities. In that case you are greatly mistaken. I will prove that you have sequestered a child, which is a very serious offence, and that you have attempted to levy black-mail, which is almost as bad. You will perhaps say that you are the girl's father; but that won't prevent the authorities from asking what has become of her, and you will have to produce her, if only to prove that you haven't murdered her!"

Aparanda recoiled and replied, "I protest against such an abominable charge."

"I don't accuse you. I even believe that the girl is alive, for you can have had no motive for getting rid of her. Indeed, you rely upon her to extort money from her mother. But I repeat that you will be compelled to bring her before the magistrate who will conduct the inquiry, and, as you have no legal claim on her, she will not be left in your power. Believe me, it will be better for you to give her up, and take the two hundred thousand francs."

Aparanda, instead of replying, drew stealthily towards the door.

"Do you think of running off?" asked the baron. "You may as well give up the attempt. You shan't leave this room without my permission. I will admit that I mean to keep you here. Monsieur Fougeray will stand guard over you while I go to enter my complaint, and you will have to repair to the commissary's office this very day. I shall not spare you in the slightest degree. Everything you have done since your arrival in Paris will be closely investigated. Your life will be thoroughly sifted, and you will be asked what your means have been during the last fifteen years. If you give a truthful reply, and say you have been very lucky at cards, I shall bring forward witnesses who will prove how your luck was brought about."

"Enough!" replied the Swede, assuming the manner of a man who has taken a sudden resolution. "Your threats are idle ones, for I have no thought of escape, and I don't refuse to tell you where Madame Montauron's daughter is. If I hesitated about doing so at first it was because I fancied you would not believe me. But, to finish the matter, I now reply that, to find the child, you and Brigitte have merely to go to Marseilles."

"To Marseilles? What does that mean?"

"Yes, to Marseilles. The little one is there in the charge of a very respectable woman, who keeps a boarding-house, No. 99 Rue de la Darse. If you doubt my word, look at this letter which she wrote to me three days ago. Read it, and you will speedily be convinced of the truth of what I state."

With a frown M. de Trémorin took hold of the letter handed to him by the Swede. The envelope bore the Marseilles post mark, and the missive

itself, a short one, signed by a woman, stated that the young girl was quite well. The woman from whom the letter appeared to come expressed a wish to hear from Aparanda, and said that the young lady was also anxious to receive a letter. All this was not quite clear, but it was scarcely to be supposed that the Swede had prepared this document for his own justification, for he could not have foreseen that the interview would take its present turn. "So you were deceiving my nephew," said M. de Trémorin, "when you told him that the girl was in the suburbs near by? What was your motive in doing that?"

"I did not wish to confide all my secrets to him, and I was right in following the course I chose, as you now threaten me with the legal authorities. I don't yield to your threats, mind, but at the point we have now reached I have nothing further to conceal from you. Go to Marseilles if you choose. I will write a letter to Madame Féréol, the boarding house-keeper, authorising her to place Madame Montauron's daughter in your hands. You can take this letter with you, and secure Brigitte as a companion. As the child knows her, she will go away with her willingly enough."

"And will you come to Marseilles as well?"

"No. I have already informed you that I don't care to find myself with that insolent creature, Brigitte. I shall remain in Paris until you return."

"What is there to show that you won't abscond during my absence?"

"I should be mad to do that. I take your word, and I believe that on your return you will bring me the two hundred thousand francs which I have no wish to lose. In addition, it is understood that I shall hand you the three letters I have kept back in exchange for the money."

All this was said so calmly and naturally that M. de Trémorin believed that the scamp before him was speaking the truth. It was evidently Aparanda's interest to remain in Paris to receive the price of his rascality. As on his arrival he had stated that he came from Italy, he might very well have passed through Marseilles and have left the girl there. Had she been in Paris she would have interfered with the shameless life he led.

The baron abruptly made up his mind. "Well, where do you live?" he asked. "It seems that you make a show of living at the Grand Hôtel, but really reside at some other place."

"Will you accompany me to the Boulevard des Capucines. It is only two steps from here. If you will go up to the third floor of the hotel you will find that I there occupy room No. 197," replied Aparanda, with perfect composure."

"Well, I agree to that, and I warn you that I shall question the servants."

"That's what I desire."

"And I also warn you that I shall have you watched."

"As you please."

"Very well. I shall start this evening by the express so that I shall reach Marseilles to-morrow. A few hours will suffice for me to settle matters with this Madame Féréol. I shall take the express again in the evening, and, by Wednesday at 10 o'clock, I shall be in Paris again. I will call on you at your hotel at noon."

"You will find me waiting for you, baron," rejoined Aparanda.

"Then come along," rejoined M. de Trémorin, taking the casket under his arm.

Aparanda made no further difficulty, and they went off without troubling

themselves about George Fougeray, who was waiting in his bedroom for the baron to summon him. He waited a long time, and when fairly tired out he at last ventured to peep into the smoking-room he was annoyed to find that there was no one there. Savinien's uncle had gone off without in any way expressing his intentions respecting money matters, and thus had fled poor George's last hope of being able to meet the promissory note.

XI.

THE terrible pay-day had come at last, and Savinien d'Amaulis was awaiting the huissier's ring like a condemned felon awaits the executioner—listening to every sound, and his terror the keener as he did not in the least know what kind of measures would be taken. He had no doubt studied the code in the days when he was a law student, but he had long since forgotten it. He had forgotten, also, that before coming to a protest the note must first of all be presented, and that no one had as yet appeared to apply for payment. He also forgot that the money-lender would, in the first instance, apply to George Fougeray, who had signed the note, whereas he, Savinien, had but endorsed it. The suspense seemed unbearable to the viscount, who remained without breakfast, as he was afraid to absent himself from home. He entertained a vague hope that Pinchard would propose some arrangement at the last moment.

He no longer relied upon George, whom he had vainly searched for on the evening before. Fougeray was not to be found, and his disappearance was ample proof that he was not able to meet his engagement. Savinien had also other grounds for anxiety. For a couple of days he had not seen either his uncle or his cousin. On calling at the Rue du Helder hotel on Monday afternoon he had been given a note from M. de Trémorin to the following effect:

"I leave Paris this evening, but shall probably be back again by the day after to-morrow. I need not tell you where I am going. You can guess the object of my journey, as I have just had an interview with a scoundrel of your acquaintance. He wanted to make off, but I mastered him, and I don't yet despair of bringing this terrible business to a satisfactory conclusion. I have taken possession of the diamonds, and restored them to a person whose name you can guess. The rest will follow, and I shall perhaps manage to save her. It will cost me no little money, but I shan't regret it if I can only restore peace to her household. I have left Yvonne in Paris in the charge of Madame de Loudinières, and I beg of you not to try to see her during my absence. On my return to Paris my first visit will be for you, and I will then explain to you various matters which I don't care to confide to paper. I will just add, however, that I don't quite understand the part played by your friend Fougeray, as regards the Swede, though he certainly rendered me a signal service."

This note was not of a kind to set Savinien at his ease. It was couched in a familiar style, no doubt, but M. de Trémorin had simply appended his name without the usual formula, "your uncle and friend." The fact that Yvonne had been entrusted to the care of match-making Madame de Loudinières also seemed fraught with ill omen to the viscount. He could, not, however, disobey the baron's order to remain aloof, and had to restrain his impatience pending the visit which would finally decide his future.

Meanwhile time was passing, and no one came with the promissory

note. It was very sultry weather, and Savinien wandered about his rooms like a soul in distress. He had left the glass door open to allow fresh air to enter freely, and at about four o'clock he perceived some one approaching outside. Rising up, half hoping that the new comer was his uncle, half fearing that he was a lawyer with instructions to protest the bill, he reached the threshold, and was agreeably surprised to see M. Pinchard, whom he at once invited to walk in. He fancied that he would be easily able to come to an understanding with the fashionable usurer.

"You know what brings me here," said Pinchard, without the slightest ceremony; "Fougeray is dead broke, and it is even said that he has absconded. So I have come to ask if you can pay the bill."

"Not to-day," replied Savinien in embarrassment. "However, I am going to sell a piece of land on which you can take a mortgage until it finds a purchaser."

"I'll take the mortgage, but I shall place the note in my lawyer's hands with instructions to push the matter; for I have no intention of sparing you. You have acted very lightly with me, viscount, and I intend to make you pay for it."

"As you choose; but your way of speaking doesn't please me, so you will pray leave the room at once."

The usurer's behaviour had fairly exasperated Amaulis, and a violent scene seemed likely to occur. However, Pinchard thought it advisable to change his tone. "I was wrong to get angry," said he; "but why on earth did your friend Fougeray refuse Count Aparanda's offer?"

"What offer?" asked Savinien. "And how does it happen that Aparanda is mixed up in this affair?"

"Come, come, viscount, I'm not a child," replied Pinchard. "Fougeray must surely have informed you of what has been going on. The Swede offered to return him the note you endorsed, on certain conditions, which might easily have been carried out."

"How does it happen that the note left your safe?"

"Oh, it was simple enough. Aparanda had some funds with me. I must tell you that I have known him for a long time, and that we did a deal of business together some twelve years or so ago. Last Monday morning he came to me to fetch his money, as he had warned me he would do, and asked me if I would let him have Fougeray's note as part of the amount I owed him. He mentioned that he had a few matters to settle with your friend. I guessed there was some woman mixed up in the story, for he told me he would return me the note if he didn't succeed in what he had in view. I risked nothing, as the count left me the amount of the note, and I was delighted at being paid before date. Unfortunately, however, Fougeray and Aparanda didn't come to terms. Fougeray declined to accept the note in exchange for some papers which had been confided to him. So Aparanda brought me back the note, and took his money in lieu of it. I had to give him the amount, as we had an agreement to that effect; and, besides, he was in a great hurry, as he meant to leave France for good that very night."

"What! the scamp has absconded?" cried Savinien.

"Yes; and I don't believe we shall ever see him again. But to come to the point, viscount, you owe me the money, and it is absolutely necessary that I should be paid. As Fougeray is insolvent, I can only rely on you; and if you can't meet the note—well, I shall have to take legal proceedings against you. I shall no doubt have to put an execution in here,

and yet it seems to me that you might spare me this painful task. Your uncle, who is very rich, won't leave you in the lurch if you apply to him. Come, shall I go and see him?"

"No! no! never!" exclaimed Savinien. "I shan't ask him for a copper even if you ruin me with costs. I have made a mistake and must bear the consequences. Besides, I would never bring Baron de Trémorin into connection with a man like you."

"A man like me is as good as any one else, and even better than a gentleman who doesn't pay his debts."

The viscount, pale with rage, was about to seize hold of Pinchard by the neck and summarily eject him when the door curtain was abruptly drawn aside, and M. de Trémorin appeared upon the threshold. Without replying to his nephew's exclamations of amazement, he walked straight towards Pinchard, and said—"I am the Baron de Trémorin, and I will pay you."

"Now and here?" asked the usurer.

"The money will be at your house in an hour's time."

"If I don't receive it by noon to-morrow you will have to settle with my lawyer."

"Leave the room, unless you want me to throw you out." And the baron punctuated this advice with a look which induced Pinchard to immediately retire.

"What! you were there, uncle, and you heard everything?" ejaculated Amaulis.

"Everything," answered the baron, "and I don't regret having listened at the door which you had left open. I learned that I had been suspecting an innocent man."

"Do you mean me?"

"No. I refer to your friend, Fougerey, whose behaviour had seemed very strange to me. I now realise, however, that he really declined Aparanda's offers. The count wanted to bribe him and secure possession of the casket. And I also realise that you, yourself, have been more imprudent than guilty."

"Then you forgive me?" said Savinien timidly, "and I may hope—"

"Well, do you know where I have been?" interrupted his uncle; "I have been to Marseilles and back. It was Aparanda who sent me there. The rascal pretended that Madame Montauron's daughter was there, and I went on a fool's errand. I only found an old woman who had charge of one of his victims—a poor girl whom he had met at Monaco, and abandoned at Marseilles. They both told me that the child had really been brought to Paris. What can he have done with her? And where has he gone? He evaded the man I left to watch him. It is strange he should have relinquished the two hundred thousand francs. However, Madame Montauron now has her diamonds, and the greater part of her letters—"

"The three which Aparanda has detained will suffice to ruin her," suggested Savinien.

"I can't help it. As I told Brigitte, I am now going back to Plouër. However, I will leave Madame Montauron a cheque for two hundred thousand francs in case Aparanda writes to her and offers to give up the child and letters. But let us talk about yourself, Savinien. You must have been crazy when you endorsed that note."

"I only did so to save a friend from ruin."

"No doubt. It was grand but foolish. You risked a deal more than Fougerey did—he hasn't much to lose; while you—Why, do you know, that if I had learned some fine morning that you had given a mortgage on your land I should have concluded that you had been leading a fast life? and I need not say what the result of such a conviction on my part would have been."

"But now you don't think anything of the kind?" said Savinien, who was greatly agitated.

"No. I know what to think. You never have been anything but a good fellow, and have only erred through hastiness and excess of generosity. There is nobody now who accuses you but Monsieur Montauron."

"Monsieur Montauron!"

"Yes, indeed. It seems that on the day of the Grand Prize, he had paid somebody to follow his wife. She was seen coming to my hotel. Montauron, from the report he received, has concluded that I favour an intrigue between his wife and you. I shan't take the trouble to undeceive him, and I hardly think that he will come to me to complain; but the least that will happen to poor Aurélie will be a separation by mutual consent. Between ourselves, she deserves this, for, by keeping back the truth, she is the cause of my formerly deceiving a worthy man. I shall not allow Yvonne to visit her again. She shall never meet her again—I'll answer for that."

"But I, uncle, I have deceived no one."

"You! That is another thing, and I may as well admit—But some one is coming here by the gate between your garden and Montauron's park."

M. de Trémorin had not closed the curtains on his arrival, and he and his nephew could now see Brigitte coming toward them with consternation on her countenance. It was easy to see that she was the bearer of bad news.

"What is the matter?" asked M. de Trémorin.

"He is dead!" said Brigitte, in a hoarse voice.

"Who is dead?"

"Monsieur Montauron. The scoundrel has killed him!"

"Aparanda! What! he has had the audacity to reappear and kill Montauron?"

"No; he has not returned."

"Then explain yourself, if you please, or I shall think that you have lost your senses."

"I was with my mistress who was weeping bitterly—for she understood that she would never see her child again—when her husband suddenly entered, holding some letters in his hand. He flung them upon the table, and said to her: 'You were this man's mistress, don't attempt to deny it!' She fell on her knees, and he began once more: 'See! he still has the audacity to write to you; open this note addressed to you, and tell me where the child is which you had by him.' She then exclaimed: 'Have pity upon me!' He raised his arm, and I rushed forward to prevent him from striking her, but he suddenly tottered and fell heavily upon the floor."

"And did not rise again?" said the baron, who was much affected.

"Apoplexy! and it killed him at once! You are right; it was indeed

Aparanda who caused his death by sending him his wife's letters. Ah ! the infamous rascal ! I ought to have strangled him when I had him in my power ! Tell me something more about poor Montauron."

"The physician said that he did not live thirty seconds after he fell, and his wife is dying, to all appearance. I knew that you must be with Monsieur d'Amaulis, and I wished to give you this letter, written by that man to her ; she has not read it, for she fainted away. I must hasten back to her. To-morrow you can tell me if I am to inform her of the fresh misfortune which it mentions."

Brigitte then handed the baron the letter which she held in her hand, and went hurriedly away. M. de Trémorin was so completely overcome that he did not attempt to detain her. "What do you say to this?" he asked his nephew.

"It is terrible!" replied Savinien.

"Ah ! poor, unhappy woman ! I cannot but accuse her, and if she has to follow her husband to the other world, I shall not pity her, for she has done much harm in this. If Aurélie had had a good mother, like your cousin Yvonne, she would not have fallen into this abyss, and even now she has not seen the end of her woes. What will become of her and her daughter now?"

"Her daughter ! Who knows ? Brigitte spoke just now of a fresh misfortune."

"True ! I remember, now that you remind me, that she left this letter ; it speaks about the child, perhaps." And the baron read aloud : "Do not search for our daughter. She is dead."

"Good heavens !" exclaimed Monsieur de Trémorin, "can the monster have killed her?"

"I don't doubt it," began Savinien, "for I saw——"

"She died," interrupted the baron, reading the letter, "'a short time after we arrived in Paris. I brought her with me, and had made up my mind to hand her over to you. A sudden illness, however, carried her off in a few hours on the day before that on which you were to come to us. I thought of leaving France to avoid having to tell you of this sad event, which I kept a secret from every one. No one saw the child except one woman, who left France on the day after this sad event, which I deplore as much and more than you. I have no reason for sparing you, as you have seen fit to set upon me two men from the provinces who are friends of yours, and who have waged merciless war upon me. I yield to them, and as I cannot revenge myself upon them I will at least punish you for your scorn. Your husband shall know what the noble damsel whom he married amounted to, as well as the worthy gentleman who made the match. When Monsieur Montauron has received what I send him, I shall be safe from his persecution, and from yours. Don't try to find out what has become of me. You will never succeed in doing so. Be content with knowing that you will never hear of me again. And do not ask where the body of our daughter lies. You forsook her from her birth. Now that she is dead you need not know where she is, and you will never know it."

"But I know !" cried Savinien.

"What ! What do you say ?" cried his uncle in amazement.

D'Amaulis now related what he had seen and heard : the hammering at night time on the floor above him at the hotel ; the early departure of the count, followed by the porter carrying the chest on his back, and the meeting in the vaults of the Provincial Bank. "I tell you that he murdered

her," he added, "and placed the body in a hiding-place, of which he alone has the key."

"If that be true this man is the most abominable scoundrel that ever lived," said M. de Trémorin. "To choose the vaults of Montauron's bank as the sepulchre of Madame Montauron's child, this is an unheard-of refinement of wickedness."

"And the most skilful calculation that can be imagined," rejoined Savinien. "The monster felt sure enough that the poor body would never be discovered. The deposits made in these vaults are inviolable. No one has a right to touch them, not even the director of the bank."

"For a certain time, no doubt," rejoined the baron. "But if the depositor does not turn up at the end of a certain number of years, the compartment must be opened, if only to let it to some one else. Besides, I need only denounce this murderer."

"If you do so, uncle, you will complete Madame Montauron's ruin. Don't you think that she has suffered enough?"

"That is true. I had not thought of that," muttered M. de Trémorin. "If I told a police officer the story of this strange deposit he would ask me how I knew of it. I should be obliged to tell him, and little by little I should have to reveal what concerns Madame Montauron. You are right. It is better to be quiet about it. And yet our silence will admit of this wretch's going free."

"Going free? He is already free. If he writes as he does it is because he is in safety. All his measures have been taken. He has, no doubt, sailed under a false name for China or Australia. He would not be found again. And, if a search were made for him, Madame Montauron would die of shame and grief. She does not know that her daughter is dead, as she has not read this infamous letter. Why inform her of this new sorrow? Brigitte has just told you that she did not dare to take upon herself to tell her of it until she had consulted you."

"Well, then, after thinking it over, I advise Brigitte to keep it a secret, and we will try to forget it also. It won't be hard to do so, as we are going back to Plouër. Country life is a sovereign cure for mental anxieties."

"We are going back!—you said *we*. Shall you take me back with you?"

"Do you suppose that I intend condemning you to become a perpetual Parisian? No! no! I am not so insane! This part of the world is not a healthy one for you. You would meet with other Fougerays, other foreign counts, and other guilty mothers, and you might not get out of the scrape so well. It is all very nice to travel but never linger on dangerous seas. Your wanderings are over, my lad. Come back to port, and stay at home if you mean to be happy."

"Happy!" cried Savinien. "My happiness depends upon you."

"Good! I understand! And I reply that it depends upon yourself. I wipe out the past, and the trial I demanded shall be completed in Brittany. It must last six months. At Christmas, then, your cousin shall decide your fate. I shall not attempt to influence her. If she wishes to marry you she will say so. If, on the contrary, she thinks that you will make but a poor sort of husband; or if, while she stays in Paris, other views become hers, you must seek elsewhere—unless you think of remaining single to the end of your days."

"Uncle, you frighten me! Yvonne has been spending two days with Madame de Loudinières, who must have profited by this chance to introduce all the marrying men she knows to her."

"Be at ease as to that. Yvonne has not stirred from the hotel. I wrote to you that I should send her to our relative, because I did not want to have you prowling about under her windows day and night. But, in point of fact, I left her with the worthy landlord and his wife."

"I shall see her soon, then?"

"Sooner than you suppose. She is waiting for me in a cab at the door. I did not wish to bring her, but she begged so hard that I had to give in."

"And you did not tell me of it!"

"I was keeping the surprise for the finish. But before we join that young lady, my daughter, who is not much wiser than you are, I must lecture you a little. It is as well that I should, since you ventured so near the edge of the precipice. You didn't fall over it, but you went too close to the brink. You must have seen that all these people who so nearly dragged you over into the abyss have not the same ideal of life as we have. They only think of growing rich, and from your boyhood you have been taught that honour is everything, and money of but little account. Money must be had, no doubt, and it is not forbidden to earn it by toil. But money isn't the aim of life, and we did not come into this world to worship the Golden Pig."

"As in my dream!" cried Savinien.

"Yes, as in your dream, as you related it to Yvonne on the day of our arrival, and it was indeed a prophetic warning to you. A day will come when that idol, falling from its pedestal, will crush our country beneath its fragments. Then those of us who have not knelt to the false gods will only have to die for invaded France, and we shall know how to die like those who fell at Patay. Come with me now. Yvonne must be weary of waiting in her cab."

Savinien had not a word to say in reply. He was wild with joy, and was not much more eloquent when he saw his cousin. But lovers do not need to be eloquent.

"My children," said the baron, as they drove along to the Rue du Helder hotel, "travel forms the mind of youth, but there ought not to be too much of it. Before I sent my nephew to Paris I ought to have re-perused the familiar fable of the 'Two Pigeons,' by La Fontaine. Savinien is going back to the dove-cot with a wounded wing and dragging claws, but he is returning home for all that, and there I advise him to remain."

"I shall keep him there," said Yvonne, softly.

"I think that he will be quite willing to stay," replied M. de Trémorin, smiling. "He has learned to his cost that true happiness is there in the old manor where he was born, far from meaningless excitement, and in the midst of those whom he loves——"

"And who love him," said Yvonne, slipping her hand into that of Savinien d'Amaulis.

EPILOGUE.

FOUR months have passed over the joys and sorrows of those who figure in this story.

Plouër is the scene of gay doings. The marriage has been hastened. By the end of October Yvonne de Trémorin will be Viscountess d'Amaulis and all Brittany will be present at the wedding. The baron has made up his mind to withdraw his funds from the Provincial Bank, and to be a

landowner only. With the three millions which are his he will rebuild the château and buy the forest on the border of his estates.

He was obliged to return to Paris to settle his accounts with the banking-house of which M. Bouret had become the director since M. Montauron's death. And, during this sad trip, he closed the eyes of Aurélie de Louvigné, who died breathing her daughter's name. The poor woman never recovered from the blow dealt her by the infamous Aparanda.

A will left by her husband placed her in possession of an immense fortune, which she left to the hospitals for the poor, without forgetting Brigitte, her faithful servant, who had ended by telling her, at last, that her daughter no longer lived.

George Fougeray, through the baron's generosity, recovered from his misfortunes, and was released from Pinchard's clutches. He afterwards made some happy hits at the Bourse, and was able to hold on to his Ottoman stock, upon which he relies more than ever, and maybe he will some day become a millionaire like many another. Mademoiselle Fourcas is in the country on a visit to Madame de Chadeuil, and the Marquis de Laffemas is paying a deal of attention to her. It is thought that he will succeed in consoling her for Viscount d'Amaulis's indifference, and, indeed, he flatters himself that he will marry her when the November hunts are over. But M. Fourcas, who has heard of the brilliant marquis's financial position, is trying to dissuade his niece from marrying him, and he may, perhaps, succeed in doing so. The little Countess de Gravigny still continues speculating most eagerly. She had a deal of trouble in paying Pinchard, and wishes to recover from her losses. But she is so seldom lucky, and her dressmaker's bills grow larger every day. She will come to sorrow from dancing too long around the Golden Pig.

The Plungers' Club did not trouble itself about Aparanda's disappearance. He had won too much money to be a favourite; and although George Fougeray had said nothing, evil reports as to this foreigner did not fail to get about. For some time there was no news of him, and Anita amused herself by declaring that he had opened a gambling-house in California, and, in fact, it was rumoured that he had really sailed for the New World. Recently, however, a newspaper correspondent, writing from Mexico, gave an account of his death. The wretch had perished in a frightful railway accident. He had been a passenger in a train on which there was a load of petroleum oil, and this train being thrown over the side of a mountain, the petroleum caught fire, and Aparanda was burned alive. It was but just. When M. Bouret, who had quite forgotten the Swedish count, learnt that he had passed out of existence, he remembered that he had been a depositor at the Bank, and had left a certain chest in compartment No. 918. This chest seemed destined to remain there for ever, as the count left no heirs of whom any one had knowledge. The case was a new and puzzling one. The compartments were let out by the year, but at the end of a year the managers usually knew whom to apply to, and if the depositor was not to be found, there was always a relative to claim the deposit. However, Count Aparanda has taken with him into another world the pass-word by which the letters were worked, and it is not likely that any one will ever claim the chest in his name.

So, when the year has run out, the director will have to make up his mind on the subject, and if he decides to force the lock, the solution of a problem which still troubles the sleep of both M. de Trémorin and

Savinien d'Amaulis will be found. Neither the uncle nor the nephew have ever spoken of the belief they entertain regarding it, and Madame Montauron died without suspecting that her daughter had perhaps no other resting-place than a compartment in a vault intended to serve as a safe keeping-place for valuables.

If Savinien is not mistaken in his conjectures, we shall next year have a discovery which will set all the police in motion, and furnish any quantity of "copy" to newspaper reporters. Murderers have fallen on fortunate days, for under the Republic they are rarely if ever captured, and even when apprehended, they are seldom guillotined. Moreover, a noble foreigner has shown them how to get rid of a dead body. But, then, what an advertisement for the Provincial Bank !

THE END.

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